David Lloyd Roberts


# safety and security guidelines for humanitarian volunteers in conflict areas

ICRC

**David Lloyd Roberts**

# STAYING ALIVE

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ICRC

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# DEDICATION

*To my wife Charlie.*

**NOTICE:** *This book contains a series of guidelines for the safety and security of staff in the field. It does not cover all situations and the advice given is of a general nature. The International Committee of the Red Cross therefore declines all responsibility for cases in which the book's recommendations do not provide the best course of action.*

# CONTENTS

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[1] Author of *Extreme emergencies: Humanitarian assistance to civilian populations following chemical, biological, nuclear and explosive incidents – A Sourcebook,* ITDG Publishing, 2004.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Lloyd Roberts (MBE, LLM) is a graduate of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. He was commissioned into the Parachute Regiment of the British Army in 1966. His army career took him to various conflict zones. He was decorated for gallantry by his Queen in 1972 and was mentioned in dispatches for distinguished service in 1978. He attended the Army Staff College at Queenscliff, Australia, in 1977. He holds a master of laws degree in international human rights law from Essex University in the UK. He is a fellow of the University of Essex Human Rights Centre. He is a Freeman of the City of London.

On leaving the Army in 1993, he joined the ICRC as its operational security adviser and two years later moved to the unit responsible for promoting international humanitarian law among the armed forces. He has carried out ICRC missions to Abkhazia, Afghanistan, Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cambodia, China, East Timor, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the former Yugoslavia, Fiji, Georgia, India, Israel and the occupied and autonomous territories, Mongolia, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Rwanda, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Zaire.

Mr Roberts has witnessed armed conflict from both the military and humanitarian perspective. This book draws on his unique experience to offer guidelines to humanitarian volunteers so that they might carry out their important work more safely and securely. Following on from the success of the first edition of ''Staying Alive'', published in 1999, this revised and updated version encompasses new and developing threats such as the one posed by chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear hazards, as well as new chapters on first aid, staying healthy on mission and the protection afforded to humanitarian volunteers by international law.

His other publications include a handbook on the law of war for the Indian armed forces (1996), an article on training armed forces in the law of war (International Review of the Red Cross, No. 319, July-August 1997) and ''The Law of Armed Conflict'', a 12-chapter training manual for armed and security forces, published by the ICRC in 2002.

Mr Roberts retired from the ICRC in 2003 and is now a consultant and lecturer in international humanitarian law, human rights law and security issues in humanitarian endeavour.

# FOREWORD

Security is an important concern for those engaged in humanitarian action. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is anxious to give to its staff all possible training and guidance in this field. That is the purpose of this book by David Lloyd Roberts.

Mr Roberts joined the ICRC in 1993 on a three-month contract. When he recently retired from full-time duties, the three months had grown to 11 years. Mr Roberts advised the ICRC on practical security and safety measures for present-day conflicts. Over the years his extensive military experience and thorough knowledge of the organization's working methods have enabled the ICRC to make considerable progress in this field. He was also involved in promoting knowledge of the law of armed conflict among armed forces personnel, as well as remaining ''on call'' for security missions.

In 1999 it was suggested that he should write a book specifically aimed at humanitarian staff working in conflict areas. The book would deal with the dangers and lay down safety guidelines. More general matters such as threat assessment, security concepts and a number of security-management aspects were deliberately not included so as not to overburden an already dense text. In addition, the author confined himself to areas in which the ICRC could make a valuable contribution because of its unique status.

The resulting book, ''Staying Alive'', has been a great success and demand for it has prompted the ICRC to ask Mr Roberts to write a revised and updated edition. The result is here before you. It retains all the successful elements of the first edition, most importantly its user-friendly presentation of practical advice. Its wealth of information is intended as much for the staff of other humanitarian organizations as for ICRC personnel. A greater awareness of security-related issues will in some cases help avert incidents and in most cases lessen their consequences.

The new edition reflects the ever-changing conflict environment in which humanitarians have to work. It deals with new threats such as nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and encompasses wider issues not covered in the first edition such as protection of humanitarian volunteers under international law and practical life-

saving first aid. The telecommunications chapter includes advice on the use of modern equipment such as mobile phones.

I am grateful to David Lloyd Roberts and all those other contributors who have generously given of their time in the production of this book. I hope it will play an important part in enhancing the safety of ICRC delegates and other humanitarian staff.

**Jakob Kellenberger**
ICRC President

# INTRODUCTION

At the outset it is perhaps important to focus on the title and aim of this book. It is not being written for any specific non-governmental organization (NGO) or humanitarian organization. Every organization has its own particular rules and regulations and the reader will naturally be expected to implement them. The aim of this book is to highlight the common features of safety and security that apply or could apply to us when working in conflict areas. It will attempt to explain in layman's terms the dangers we might face and some of the likely threats to our work.

Through explanation we can hopefully lay to rest some of the mystique surrounding the subject. Yes, there are dangers, but if you have a basic understanding of them, they can be avoided, or certainly dramatically reduced. As the old saying goes, "Knowledge dispels fear." Since you are ultimately the guardian of your own safety and security, knowledge also puts you in a better position to define that important line which it is perhaps too dangerous for you, and those in your charge, to cross.

Humanitarian workers – especially new volunteers – are bombarded (even before they reach the conflict zone!) with a plethora of good advice, rules, regulations and check-lists. My aim is certainly not to burden you further. On the contrary, it is to combine the main features of these rules in one simple and useful book.

Before going on, I should like to make a few points about terms used in the title.

## GUIDELINES

This is important. These are not *rules*. Rules will no doubt be issued by your own organization. For example, "No driving at night in such-and-such a place," or "Because of the curfew, be in your house by such-and-such a time." These are quite clear and should be obeyed.

Guidelines, on the other hand, are just that: the best available advice in a general setting or situation. They should be viewed as such and not as the definitive answer to every problem. For example, one might suggest that if caught in the open with artillery

shells falling very close to you, the best guideline would be to get out of your vehicle and take cover. However, if 20 metres in front of you there is a tunnel through a mountain, you would be very wise to put your foot down and seek its protection! Therefore, please combine the contents of this book with your own *common sense and judgement*.

There are times in this book when guidelines might become obvious rules, e.g. "Do not touch a mine." In such cases the "Do not" will be clearly highlighted.

## VOLUNTEERS

Remember, you have volunteered for this work.

In conflict there is inherent danger. You owe it to yourself to know what those dangers are and how to minimize them.

## CONFLICT AREAS

The book deals only with conflict areas. The subjects covered are therefore fairly specific and do not encompass the other wide-ranging areas of humanitarian work such as disaster relief. It is nevertheless well to remember that relative calm and tranquillity in our modern world can quickly disintegrate into violence. Also, some of the topics are relevant in whatever theatre you find yourself: basic security measures against crime, use of the radio, fire precautions, etc.

We hope this book will be of some assistance to you in your vital work of assisting the victims of armed conflict.

## LOCALLY RECRUITED STAFF

This book is intended as much for the locally recruited staff of humanitarian organizations as it is for their expatriate staff.

It is now generally agreed that good security for the individual and the organization depends on the following interrelated factors:

- how we are perceived and thus whether we are accepted by the local people;
- our behaviour as individuals;
- our ability to listen, as opposed to preaching, and our ability to put our message across and project a professional image.

*CHAPTER 1*

# PERSONAL SECURITY

As mentioned, you have volunteered to work in a conflict zone. Being sensible, you have given this matter some thought. You have not approached it lightly. Conflict is dangerous; it is not a game. All NGOs mention in their staff contracts at some point that the employee accepts the risks inherent in his or her work. Most will then ensure through good initial training, briefing and in-country procedures that you are fully prepared and looked after in the best possible way.

Given good training and back-up, what can you do to help yourself?

## ADJUSTING

Your normal routine and behaviour will have to be adjusted to deal with your new situation. Fine words... but what do they mean?

Let's be honest with ourselves and then make the necessary adjustment. Imagine that you are walking down the main street of your home town on a wonderfully sunny Saturday morning. You have the whole weekend to look forward to. Your mind is in neutral, you are relaxing – and why not? Or you are driving home from the office. The car radio is playing some pleasant music and you are thinking of your busy day. On routine occasions like this you might not actually be fully aware of exactly where you are; you are just wandering around or driving bumper to bumper as you do every day.

In your new situation, in addition to the fact that free weekends are rare, you cannot simply behave as you are used to doing.

In your new town or in the field, you must always *be aware* of exactly what is happening around you. You must be alert. You must try to *think ahead,* to avoid problems and possible danger. Always know where you are and where you are going. Getting lost could put you in danger. Take an interest in the immediate surroundings of the area through which you are travelling; think about where you might take shelter or find cover if you need it. This represents quite a big

change from your normal behaviour and lifestyle. If you make a conscious effort, it is surprising how quickly you will adjust and, as a result, be much safer in your new environment.

## BE INQUISITIVE

Seek information about your new environment. Ask about the risks or threats to your security.

In the turmoil of the operation under way, the newcomer is sometimes not well briefed. Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask questions. Ask your boss, your colleagues, the local staff, local people and even the armed forces. Get as much information as you can as it is one of the best ways to safeguard your security.

## USE YOUR COMMON SENSE AND JUDGEMENT

If in doubt, don't press on regardless, relying on good luck! Like everyone else, you have an important gift: *intuition,* sometimes called a "gut feeling". Why not use it? It is there to tell you that something is not quite as it should be. It is a sort of safety valve. If you feel that the threat to a particular mission or field trip is too high, discuss it with your head of office or with local staff. It is far more sensible to show *moral courage* and recommend a postponement rather than to risk your life and those of your local staff and drivers.

Tomorrow is another day. Reassess the risk and if it really seems reasonable, then proceed. Heroics are strictly for the movies. Being a hero might just lead to unfortunate consequences for you personally and be disastrous for the operation as a whole. It is sometimes necessary to protect yourself first in order to be able to protect the victims later.

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Inevitably, at some stage or other, you will suffer from the stress of working and living in a difficult environment. This is an absolutely natural reaction. You can help yourself by eating properly, by getting adequate sleep and by making sure you take regular breaks.

These simple guidelines are often ignored: "I don't need this sort of advice. I'm perfectly able to look after myself." You smoke yourself to death, you hardly eat, you become irritable... but you're fine,

right? Beware. You are doing yourself absolutely no good at all. Your performance will rapidly diminish. You will become a burden to your colleagues and useless to the people you have come to help.

## GROUP SAFETY AND SECURITY

We will not dwell long on group safety because this book is aimed at personal security.

However, unless the group as a whole is conscious of safety and security matters, the individuals in it will suffer. Team members should regard safety measures as just another tool of their trade, something that will benefit the mission as a whole. The leader must set the example and show that he or she is interested in security and the safety of the staff.

It is important to identify the threats in your area and to discuss them as a group. How will you deal with them and how will you minimize them?

The group must cultivate a system for sharing important security information: briefings, discussions, incident reporting, etc.

**Security is everyone's concern – it is very much a state of mind and very much a matter of common sense.**

## THE AIM

Make the aim clear at the outset and then look at security factors that might affect the degree to which you achieve it.

Ask yourself questions such as: "Whom do we intend to assist? With which parties to the conflict is it essential to establish relations?" The answers will give you an idea of the risks involved in achieving your aim and help you plan how to work as safely as possible.

*CHAPTER 2*

# THE NATURE OF MODERN CONFLICT AND THE BROAD RANGE OF CONFLICT SITUATIONS THAT YOU MIGHT FACE

The range of armed conflict situations in which you might have to work is extremely broad, complex and confusing. Not only for the humanitarian volunteer but sometimes also for the warring parties, who have frequently lost sight of why they were fighting in the first place! Money, greed, power, drug-trafficking, plain crime, banditry and extremism have in many cases taken the place of noble ideas such as the struggle for freedom and self-determination.

Let us try, for our own benefit, to simplify the situation. In terms of international law, there are three broad categories of conflict which you might encounter. Superimposed on any of these broad categories there can be additional threats of violence posed, for example, by terrorism, extremist ideology, and insurgency.

## INTERNATIONAL ARMED CONFLICT

An international armed conflict arises when one State uses armed force against another State or States. The term also applies to all cases of total or partial military occupation. An international armed conflict is considered to be over once active hostilities or territorial occupation have ceased. Despite the scale of such conflicts in the main, they are relatively simple situations for humanitarians to cope with. The sides are clearly defined and they even wear different uniforms. The front lines are well known. The armed forces have a structured chain of command. It is not too difficult to find a point of contact through which to notify all sides of your locations and movements in order to arrange safe passage for relief supplies and so on. Humanitarian organizations generally adopt a high profile – we are predictable and we are visible owing to our emblems.

The parties to the conflict are generally aware of their obligations under international humanitarian law and will try to meet them, but of course, there will always be exceptions. All four Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I apply to this type of conflict.

For humanitarians, therefore, the features of international conflicts are:

- classic humanitarian tasks;
- relatively low level of risk;
- fewer obstacles to our work than in lower-level conflict;
- security primarily based on and strengthened by factors such as reliable information and a high degree of recognition and acceptance of the organization.

## NON-INTERNATIONAL ARMED CONFLICT

Non-international armed conflicts, also known as internal armed conflicts, take place within the territory of a State and do not involve the armed forces of any other State. In some cases the State's armed forces are used against dissident, rebel or insurgent groups. In others, there are two or more armed groups fighting within a State, but not necessarily with the involvement of government troops. Slightly different provisions of the law apply where the internal opposition is better organized in terms of command and control of territory, and therefore able to carry out sustained and concerted military operations and itself implement the law. But this is the case only if government forces are involved. In a non-international armed conflict, each party is bound to apply, as a minimum, the fundamental humanitarian provisions of international law contained in Article 3 common to all four Geneva Conventions. Those provisions are developed in and supplemented by Additional Protocol II of 1977. Both common Article 3 and Additional Protocol II apply with equal force to all parties to an armed conflict, government and rebels alike.

This situation is now more difficult for the humanitarian volunteer. The opposing sides are not so well defined; perhaps not all are wearing uniforms; points of contact on one side – say the government's – might be excellent, while on the other side – perhaps to ensure its own safety and security – those contact points might be tenuous to say the least. Arranging a relief convoy, for example, might take some time as you wait for those responsible to be contacted and to give their consent.

Generally, the belligerents will have a degree of respect for humanitarian workers. However, the situation in the world today is becoming less transparent. Clearly defined front lines may not even exist, or they may change very quickly, which can be dangerous for

us. Large battles may occur, but a more common feature of this type of conflict is the hit-and-run skirmish in which we can unwittingly become caught up in the crossfire. The deliberate targeting of civilians is in many cases more frequent. The full range of weapons – from aircraft to mines – may be used.

For us in such cases:

- The classic humanitarian tasks remain.
- There is a higher level of risk.
- Events are less predictable.
- Contacts may be more difficult to arrange.
- Greater obstacles stand in the way of our work: more restrictions, more complicated and time-consuming negotiations, more controls and more delays.
- It remains important to obtain reliable information and achieve recognition and acceptance, but all this becomes more difficult.

## INTERNAL DISTURBANCES AND TENSIONS[2]

Lower levels of internal violence go by the legal term ''internal disturbances and tensions''. The military tend to refer to them as ''internal security operations''. They are not covered by international humanitarian law but by international human rights law and standards and by the State's own domestic law.

Features of such situations are typically:

- violent demonstrations and riots;
- mass arrests;
- large numbers of persons detained for security reasons;
- administrative detention for long periods;
- ill-treatment and torture of detainees and keeping them incommunicado for long periods;
- repressive measures taken against relatives of persons deprived of their freedom;
- suspension of fundamental judicial guarantees, either *de facto* or *de jure* (proclaiming a state of emergency);

[2] The generally accepted definitions of these terms are those put forward by the ICRC to the first Conference of Government Experts in 1971. See Conference of Government Experts, documents submitted by the ICRC, Title V, *Protection of Victims of Non-international Armed Conflicts*,1971, p.79.

- large-scale measures restricting personal freedom, such as exile, assigned residence, displacement;
- allegations of forced disappearances;
- increase in the number of acts of violence (such as sequestration and hostage taking) which endanger defenceless persons or spread terror among the civilian population;
- harassment of journalists and lawyers representing detainees and suspects, and of others who may draw attention to repression;
- allegations of unlawful killings.

Violence can come from many kinds of groups, ranging from armed gangs, bandits and militants to violent sections of the civilian population opposing government forces. The nature of the violence is difficult to predict. Militias, gangs and even individuals often work in a ''freelance'' manner, engaging in constantly shifting alliances. There may be no clear command structure and it may be very difficult to negotiate one's safety or to rely on any guarantees obtained. There might be little respect for humanitarian workers or for what they are trying to achieve. Indeed, we can become targets because there is a misunderstanding about who or what we represent. These groups might be eager to steal our vehicles, equipment and supplies. In response to the threat, humanitarians in such circumstances might adopt a low profile and be much more

discreet; we might reduce our visibility (e.g. by foregoing the use of emblems and using unmarked cars); we might vary our routes and times of travel.

In such situations of anarchy, with a complete breakdown of law and order, the safety and security of our people becomes an overriding concern. There is a balance to be struck in such an environment between the time and effort spent on remaining secure and what, if anything, we can achieve. It is a balance that must be constantly borne in mind by those in authority, particularly heads of office in the field.

The situation of humanitarians in such an environment is characterized by the following:

- humanitarian work certainly needed, but extremely difficult to meet that need;
- very high level of risk, perhaps bordering on the unacceptable;
- severely restricted ability to work;
- security based more on technical elements such as active or passive protection than on actual acceptance by all parties.

## ADDITIONAL FEATURES OF MODERN-DAY CONFLICT

**The conflict environment** in which humanitarians have to operate has changed considerably in recent years and seems to be in a state of constant change. Whilst the classic division of conflict into the above-mentioned three main categories remains valid, many other factors have come into play, and all have an effect on our security. In broad terms (because the purpose of this book is not to get into a highly charged academic or political debate but rather to focus on personal security), we face the following new features in modern conflict.

In response to calculated acts of terror committed by extremist non-State entities, Western States are engaged in a confrontation of near-global dimensions. That confrontation is ''asymmetric'' in nature, it has no clear front lines, a variety of parties are involved and its impact is not limited to a given geographical area.

Pressures on all actors to choose sides has increased with declarations such as ''You are either with us or against us.'' In the post-9/11 world there is a perception that humanitarianism has

been ''politicized'', i.e. used as a smokescreen to further this or that party's political agenda. At the same time, certain parties in certain circumstances have simply rejected it out of hand. Any abuse of humanitarian action for political ends poses the risk of a dangerous blurring of the line that separates the core principles of neutral, independent, impartial humanitarian action, on one side, from military or foreign policy endeavour, on the other, with the result that humanitarian staff are sometimes viewed as legitimate targets by those who identify them with the policies of this or that belligerent and/or government.

Humanitarian action relies very much on the application of international law (international humanitarian law and human rights law). In recent years, that law has been far too often violated and the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance has come under increasing pressure. To make matters worse, this situation has contributed to a more dangerous working environment for humanitarians.

**The security environment** in conflict has also changed in recent years and there are some new and important features of which we should be aware. These features can be found in any of the levels of violence we have already covered. Whilst ''being in the wrong place at the wrong time'' is, as it has always been, the most probable security risk in most countries, today we face new challenges. In particular there is the danger of being targeted by entities whose radius of action is not limited to a specific geographical theatre. In other words, humanitarian agencies face global threats. One of the main current challenges is to incorporate this global reality in our analysis of the local and regional situation as a means of consolidating security management. In addition to approaching the problem through political channels, many organizations have taken preventive measures (physical changes to their premises, restrictions and other changes regarding access, sensitive documents and radio communications, suspicious letters or parcels, surveillance measures, etc.). Among present-day threats are car-bombs, improvised explosive devices, booby-trapped parcels or letters, and suicide bombers. **The aim of this section is not to provide answers to what are very complicated and highly charged political issues. Rather, it is to draw your attention to these issues so that you are better able to see how they might affect your own safety.**

## DIRECT TARGETING OF HUMANITARIANS

Are we working in a deteriorating security environment?

Humanitarian work is widely viewed as becoming more dangerous. There is talk of humanitarians being ''soft targets''. In fact, statistics show that the total number of security incidents involving humanitarian workers is falling. However, the same data reveal a new and very worrying trend in terms of the nature of the incidents. There appears to be a rising proportion of serious cases of direct targeting. So, there may be fewer incidents, but their seriousness is increasing. Although this is not entirely new, the proportion, deliberateness and lethality have all grown sharply in recent years.

Why is this happening? There are a number of reasons. We have mentioned some of the perception issues above. But there are other causes. One is that far more NGOs exist today than did just a decade ago. Therefore, more people are exposed to this risk and there are consequently likely to be more incidents. Another reason is the ''global war on terror''. Unwritten agreements once enabled humanitarians to operate, but in the new situation these no longer exist in some parts of the world. As a recent report put it: ''In the past, armed groups might have seen some advantage in the presence of humanitarian actors because of their own interest in protecting and assisting non-combatants in the areas they controlled. In conflicts where mobile and clandestine extremist groups control no territory and do not necessarily aspire to control any, the presence of humanitarians may be perceived as more of a nuisance than an asset.''[3]

Is the security situation as dire as all that or are we humanitarians overreacting? Whilst the situation in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq is bad, elsewhere threats to staff safety remain much as they did before: crime, road accidents and hazards of war such as crossfire incidents and mine explosions. The direct targeting mentioned above is very worrying but not new. Humanitarians have been targeted before. What is new is the increased number of these incidents in particular countries.

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[3] *The future of humanitarian action: Implications of Iraq and other recent crises*. Report of an International Mapping Exercise, Feinstein International Famine Centre, Tufts University, January 2004, p.5.

We should not overreact. We should naturally focus on the reasons for the deterioration in certain countries since we need to be better informed about the threat and why it exists in the first place. We need to get to know better the groups that may target humanitarian agencies in order to understand their perception of us, their motivation and the communities with which they interact. We need to develop new ways of networking with all those who can influence the conflict so that we can continue our work and enhance our acceptability.

## THE BLURRING OF ROLES BETWEEN HUMANITARIANS AND THE MILITARY

In conflict situations, there has long been a customary distinction between military and non-military domains of endeavour. Recently however, military forces have increasingly become involved in traditional humanitarian activities, including aid for the local population. The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, have seen the military assume a major role in certain types of relief. These military operations for supposedly humanitarian purposes have eroded the dividing line between humanitarian[4] and military action (or ''space''),[5] a fundamental distinction.

Humanitarians believe this has had a negative impact on their safety. It has caused confusion regarding their ability to come to the aid, in an independent, neutral and impartial manner, of people affected by conflict. Since armed forces are subordinated to a political mission, they cannot be neutral. However, if humanitarians

[4] The latest ECHO study defines scope for humanitarian action (or, as ECHO calls it, ''humanitarian space'') as follows: ''the access and freedom for humanitarian organizations to assess and meet humanitarian needs''. See Echo Security Review 2004, p.71, http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo/index_en.htm.
The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group (IASC-WG) makes these important additional remarks essential to any definition: ''The delivery of humanitarian assistance to all populations in need must be neutral and impartial – it must come without political or military conditions and humanitarian staff must not take sides in disputes or political positions.'' See IASC Reference Paper, *Civil-military relations in complex emergencies,* 28 June 2004, p.8.

[5] Some organizations prefer the term ''humanitarian action'' as it more accurately describes the type and scope of humanitarian activities.

are not perceived as neutral, their impartiality and trustworthiness will obviously be in doubt. Their access to people in need, as well as their own security, will be jeopardized. Associating with a military force in a conflict zone – however indirectly and unavoidably – will imply to some that the agency in question sides with one group against another. When this association is perceived as having grown too close, local hostility may result. Examples are the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Somalia in 1993 and, more recently, Afghanistan and Iraq.

## THE ''HEARTS AND MINDS'' ISSUE

The winning of the population's ''hearts and minds'' is very important to the military and this is closely linked with the blurring issue. The military need the people. Hearts-and-minds operations are an ancient tool of war intended to get the population on your side and to gain intelligence. Humanitarians also need the people, but for completely different reasons. They need them because they are their *raison d'être*. In conflict situations, the people are the victims and the task of humanitarians is to support and protect them to the best of their ability. Humanitarians must act impartially and independently or they will violate their basic principles.

Humanitarians feel that military hearts-and-minds operations, designed to maximize security, can get blurred together with humanitarian operations, which aim to save and protect life and prevent suffering – this on an impartial basis. The military's aim is to secure the support of certain groups because they live in a certain place and are friendly or potentially so. This strategy might ignore those who are objectively most in need, but who do not constitute a priority for military planners. This might well cause jealousy and resentment between tribes, clans, etc., which could easily rebound on NGOs operating in the area. Extensive use of military forces to provide humanitarian aid makes it difficult for opposing parties and the local population to distinguish between independent humanitarian organizations and opposing armies. This can strip aid workers of their perceived neutrality and they can become targets for the warring factions. Serious problems can arise when military personnel deploy in white four-wheel-drive vehicles, wear civilian clothes and carry weapons. It is hardly surprising if the local people then confuse them with humanitarian workers, who – apart from the

weapons – must look very much the same. Further problems occur when military forces offer aid with ''strings attached'', for example, in return for intelligence information.

The problem, therefore, is not so much that the military become involved in humanitarian activities, as hearts-and-minds operations are not going to disappear. The problem is when the military link their ''humanitarian operations'' to political and military objectives in a way that gives to the local population the impression that they are assuming the role of humanitarians.

Most humanitarians understand that the military must occasionally get involved if they are the only ones able to provide aid, and if that aid is truly life-saving, such as when military units are the first to reach a war-affected region or a natural disaster zone. There are a number of recent examples of this direct involvement: northern Iraq in April 1991, Kosovo in April 1999 and the Asian tsunami in December 2004. The military can also play an important – if not vital – role (of which humanitarian organizations are not so capable) in clearing or establishing supply routes, building bridges and then ensuring they remain open for humanitarian traffic, demobilizing warring factions, securing a point of entry such as a port or airport, clearing minefields to facilitate access to the victims, clearing unexploded ordnance, and military transport (aircraft and shipping) to help deliver relief.

Thus, the blurring issue is many-faceted and has important security implications for us.

## INTEGRATED OPERATIONS

Closely linked with the blurring issue is the relatively new and highly charged debate over ''integrated operations''. The need for ''coherence'' is something often heard in this debate. The idea is to achieve increased efficiency or economies of scale on UN operations by streamlining the military, political and humanitarian effort.

Broadly speaking, the military and UN see ''integration'' as the way of using humanitarian action to the best possible advantage, i.e. from a political, military and humanitarian perspective. Those who support the idea argue that such operations need not impose restrictions on humanitarian organizations and that within the

integrated mission framework there is still room for separation between the military, political, and humanitarian components in a given scenario.

Humanitarians tend to see the issue in a slightly different light. They once had their own ''dimension'' to operate in, but this is being eroded. This erosion has resulted in a blurring of and confusion about their task of working in an independent neutral and impartial way for the benefit of the victims. They believe this has had a negative impact on their security. For humanitarians, the ''integration'' concept represents a worrying example of the merging of humanitarian and political agendas by suggesting the need for an overall command-and-control structure that uses humanitarian aid as ''one tool in the toolbox'' of conflict management.[6]

The integrated mission concept is intruding into the humanitarian dimension and compromising the core principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. It is difficult, for example, to see how integrated operations would fit into the concept of neutrality of most humanitarian organizations. Humanitarians could hardly object to being involved in the coordination of a complex operation. However being subjected to outside command and control is another matter. The debate goes on!

## BANDITRY AND CRIME

Banditry and other crime can occur at any of the levels of conflict and in any of the situations of armed violence described above. There will always be those on the fringes of conflict ready to take advantage of the circumstances. The ever-growing threat they pose is real and dangerous. Bandits and other criminals are unlikely to be under any form of control. They might simply be acting out of self-interest. In this case, expatriate staff are in exactly the same position as any other foreigners living in the country. The emblem used by your organization no longer protects you. Perceived vulnerability increases the risk and the organization must do what it can to appear a tough target, employing the usual protective measures such as physical barriers, alarms and guards. Treat

[6] HPN Network Paper, *A bridge too far: Aid agencies and the military in humanitarian response*, J. Barry with A. Jefferys, ODI 2002, p. 8. Also cited in VENRO Position Paper, *Armed forces as humanitarian aid workers*, May 2003, p.7.

bandits and criminals with the greatest caution. **Do not resist if they attempt to rob you.**

## CHILD SOLDIERS

It is an unfortunate feature of modern conflicts that more and more child soldiers are being used by belligerents. International humanitarian law prohibits recruitment into the armed forces of children under the age of 15. However, that law is often violated. These children can pose a considerable threat to humanitarian workers, particularly when they are trying to impress their superiors and even more particularly when they are fed a diet of alcohol and drugs. **Treat these child soldiers with the utmost caution** and if possible give them a wide berth.

*CHAPTER 3*

# PROTECTION AFFORDED BY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

**Humanitarians operating in hostile environments do so under the protection of international law.** The aim in this section is not to turn all humanitarian volunteers into lawyers. Rather it is to draw your attention to some of the key elements of international humanitarian law specifically designed to protect you and the victims of armed conflict. It will also let you know where you can get further information if you need it.

## KNOWING THE LAW

Knowing the law might be useful to you in a number of ways. Points you make to military personnel or other types of armed groups on application of the law will be much more credible if they are backed by sound knowledge. It will help you argue your case and so help you obtain permission for a particular task. Humanitarians should be in a position to know how the law protects both them and the victims of armed conflict and when the law is being broken. There might be times when you have to explain to a soldier what the law has to say on a particular point. Sometimes it could help you or those you are trying to assist.

You should be aware that the law has been developed to:

- **protect**, in time of conflict, persons who do not take part take part in the hostilities such as:
  - civilians and medical and religious personnel;
  - combatants who have stopped fighting because, for example, they are wounded or have been captured or have surrendered;
- **limit** the violence to what is needed to achieve the military aim.

This law exists in the form of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols of 1977 and many other related treaties and conventions. The problem is that although many States in the world have signed up to some or all of these treaties, far too often their rules are violated. These violations can directly affect the

safety of humanitarian workers in the field. Space precludes a detailed review of all aspects of the relevant law. However, it would serve you well and enhance your safety to know a little about the following.

States have the primary responsibility for the security and protection of humanitarian staff as well as the safety and dignity of the population under their control.

Under the **Geneva Conventions** and their **Additional Protocols**,[7] civilians are protected from harm. Additional Protocol I,[8] for example, states that in order to ensure respect for and protection of the civilian population and civilian property, those fighting must at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian property and military objectives. You are clearly a civilian, so you too are protected.

The **Statute of the International Criminal Court**[9] makes it a war crime to carry out intentional attacks against the civilian population or against individual civilians not taking a direct part in hostilities. It goes on to state that it is also a war crime to intentionally direct attacks against personnel or equipment, infrastructure, etc. involved in humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping missions in accordance with the UN Charter.

In 1999, the **Convention on the Safety of the United Nations and Associated Personnel** entered into force.[10] However, the Convention is not applicable to humanitarian non-governmental organizations that do not have implementing or partnership agreements with the UN and its specialized agencies.

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[7] Available at www.icrc.org. The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 are intended to protect the victims of armed conflict. The First Geneva Convention deals with the wounded and sick in armed forces on land, the Second with the wounded, sick and shipwrecked at sea, the Third with the treatment of prisoners of war, and the Fourth with protection for civilians in wartime. Additional Protocol I of 1977 deals with international armed conflicts. Additional Protocol II deals with non-international armed conflicts.

[8] Additional Protocol I, Article 48. See also Articles 17 and 51.

[9] Article 8, 2(b) (i) & (iii) – War Crimes. For full text, see http://www.un.org/law/icc/statute/romefra.htm.

[10] Available at http:www.un.org/law/cod/safety.htm.

**UN Security Council resolution 1502**,[11] which was adopted in 2003 following the bombing of the UN compound in Baghdad, reaffirmed that killing humanitarian aid workers is a war crime. All UN members have a responsibility to end impunity and bring to justice those who commit these crimes.

## HUMANITARIAN AID

Humanitarians should be aware of the rules relating to humanitarian aid, in particular the controls that can be applied by the military and the safety and security provisions obliging the military to protect humanitarians during delivery of that aid. You should also understand that the warring parties must allow the free passage of all consignments of humanitarian aid essential to the survival of the civilian population, even if destined for the ''enemy's'' population. Examples of such aid are medical and hospital supplies, essential food, clothing, bedding, materials for shelter, particular items of food and medicine required for children, expectant mothers and maternity cases. The armed forces of the warring parties can make technical arrangements for transport through their territory such as the routes and timetables for convoys. They can satisfy themselves that the supplies are exclusively of a humanitarian and impartial nature (i.e. they could not be used for hostile purposes nor give any military advantage to an opponent) and that they cannot be diverted from their intended destination. The relief personnel participating in such missions are subject to the approval of the party in whose territory they will carry out their work. The convoys can be searched. Whilst conducting the relief mission, the humanitarian organization must take into account the security requirements of the party in whose territory they are operating. If they do not, the mission may be terminated. The parties to an armed conflict must guarantee the safety of humanitarian relief convoys in their territory and facilitate the rapid distribution of aid.[12]

It is important to know the responsibilities of an occupying power under international humanitarian law. An occupying power must fill

[11] See full text at http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions03.html.

[12] Fourth Geneva Convention, Art.23; Additional Protocol I, Art. 69-71; Additional Protocol II, Art. 18.

the administrative vacuum and assume special responsibilities for administering the occupied territory and for meeting the civilian population's needs from a humanitarian viewpoint. The Fourth Geneva Convention specifies the duty of an occupying power to ensure the adequate provision of food and medical supplies,[13] and the maintenance of public health in the territory that it controls. All parties to the conflict are obliged to allow the ICRC or any other impartial humanitarian organization to undertake its own humanitarian relief actions (GC IV, Art. 59).

## MINES AND EXPLOSIVE REMNANTS OF WAR

Regarding legal protection against the mine threat, it would be useful to know the main provisions of the **Ottawa Convention** (i.e. the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction).[14] This is considered by many to be a landmark treaty aimed at eliminating, once and for all, the suffering caused by anti-personnel mines. The States party to it have undertaken never under any circumstances:

- to use anti-personnel landmines;
- to develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer anti-personnel landmines, either directly or indirectly;
- to assist, encourage or induce, in any way, anyone to engage in any activity prohibited by the Convention.

States must also (within the specific time frame laid down by the Convention):

- destroy or ensure the destruction of all their stockpiles of anti-personnel mines;
- clear mined areas under their jurisdiction or control;
- if in a position to do so, provide assistance for the care and rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration, of mine victims and for mine-awareness programmes;
- if in a position to do so, provide assistance for mine clearance and related activities.

[13] Fourth Geneva Convention, Art. 55.

[14] The full text can be found on the ICRC's international humanitarian law website at http://www.icrc.org/ihl.

Not all States have yet ratified the Ottawa Convention.[15] It would therefore also be useful to know something about the mine-related responsibilities of warring parties under an earlier treaty, i.e. **Protocol II (as amended) to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons**. This is particularly important because whereas the Ottawa Convention deals with anti-personnel mines, this Protocol lays down rules for the ongoing problems caused by anti-tank (or anti-vehicle) mines, booby traps and other devices. In particular, it requires that the parties to a conflict protect the following from the effects of mines, booby traps and other devices:

- United Nations peacekeeping forces or observer missions, and UN humanitarian or fact-finding missions;
- operations of the International Committee of the Red Cross, of National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies, of their International Federation or of similar humanitarian missions;
- any operation by an impartial humanitarian organization.

The degree of protection will depend on the circumstances and the tactical situation. However, the military are required so far as they are able to take the measures needed to protect a UN force or humanitarian mission from the effects of mines, booby traps and other devices in any area under their control. If access to or through their territory is necessary, they should provide safe passage, that is unless ongoing hostilities make it impossible. In this case, the military should inform the head of the mission or humanitarian organization of a safe route, if such information is available. And if information identifying a safe route is not available, so far as is necessary and feasible, the military should clear a lane through minefields.

Any information provided to the mission or force is to be treated in strict confidence by the recipient and not released outside the force or mission without the express authority of the information-provider.[16]

It is worthwhile knowing something about the latest Protocol to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, dealing with unexploded ordnance and abandoned explosive ordnance. Known

[15] You can find out exactly which States have ratified a particular treaty by going to the ICRC website and clicking on ''States party to the various treaties''.

[16] Amended Protocol II to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Art. 12. Again, for the full text, see the ICRC's humanitarian law website.

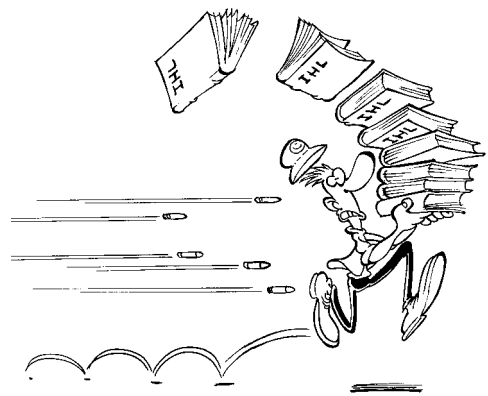
as the **Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War**,[17] it requires (among other things) the States party to it to:

- mark and clear, remove or destroy explosive remnants of war in territory under their control;
- take all feasible precautions to protect the civilian population, including humanitarian missions and organizations operating in their territory, from the risks and effects of explosive remnants of war;
- where feasible, provide information on the location of those remnants when requested to do so by such organizations.

## SAFETY ZONES

Humanitarians and indeed the military should be aware of the law concerning the establishment of ''safety zones'' or ''protected areas''. These are designed to protect the civilian or military victims of conflict from the effects of hostilities. They include such options as the creation of hospital zones and localities,[18] neutralized zones,[19] non-defended localities,[20] and perhaps the better-known demilitarized zones.[21]

The law is there to protect humanitarian workers as well as the victims of armed conflict. You must regard knowledge of the more relevant aspects of the law as important to your safety.




[17] Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War (Protocol V to the 1980 Convention), 28 November 2003. Again full details can be found on the ICRC website.

[18] First Geneva Convention, Art 23.

[19] Second Geneva Convention, Art 15

[20] Additional Protocol I, Art 59.

[21] Additional Protocol I, Art 60.

*CHAPTER 4*

# THE MAJOR THREATS TO YOUR SAFETY AND SECURITY

We will now look at the major threats to your safety. They exist at all the levels of conflict outlined before. It could be argued that the threat of air attack is most unlikely in low-intensity conflict. However, you will remember that helicopter gunships were used in Somalia, for example. Obviously they were not directed at humanitarian workers but, nevertheless, finding yourself by accident or misfortune in an area under such attack is clearly dangerous. Therefore, all the threats outlined below should be taken seriously by you.

We will look at:

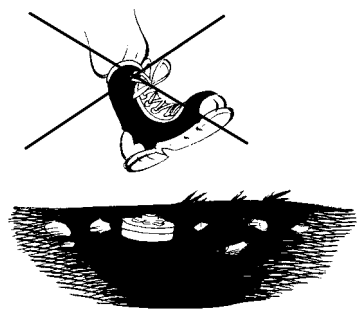
- mines, both anti-personnel and anti-tank;
- artillery, mortars and rockets;
- snipers and general gunfire;
- ambushes;
- improvised explosive devices;
- grenades;
- booby traps;
- unexploded military ordnance (ammunition);
- depleted uranium munitions;
- the threat from the air.

## THE MINE THREAT

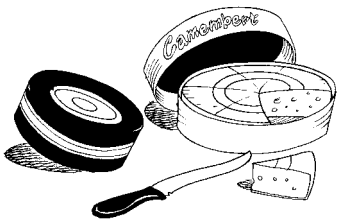
There are two types of mine: anti-personnel and anti-tank.

### ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES

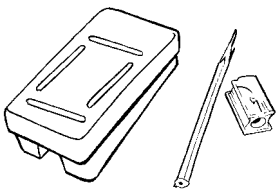
Anti-personnel mines (AP mines) are designed to cause injury to people rather than to equipment. They can have a major psychological effect on a military opponent. They slow him down and take a long time to locate and clear. They might be laid in conjunction with anti-tank mines or by themselves.



To be effective, they are unlikely to be laid as single mines but rather in groups. (In the following drawings other familiar objects are sketched simply to give an idea of scale.)



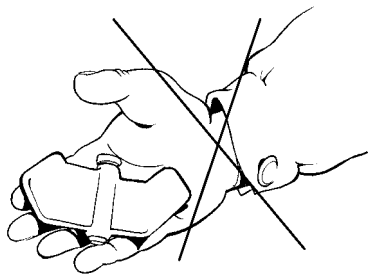

**The pressure mine.** You step on it, or a vehicle drives over it, and it explodes. It is generally round in shape, 60-100 mm in diameter (about the size of a doughnut or Camembert cheese) and 40-60 mm in height. Older types are made of metal but most modern ones are made of plastic, making them very difficult to detect. They are made to blend into their surroundings, being green, brown, grey, etc. in colour.



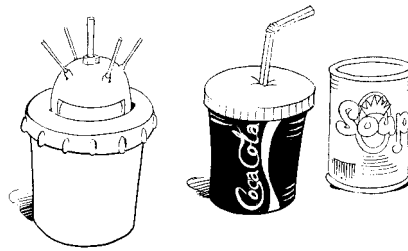
Some exceptions to the classic pressure mine are as follows.

**The wooden or plastic rectangular AP mine.** This is shaped like a pencil box 140 mm long and 30 mm high.

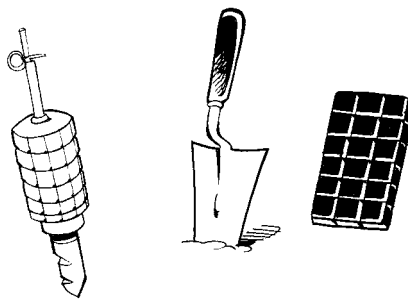
**The air-delivered AP mine or "butterfly mine".** This is shaped much like the "winged" seed of an ash tree. You may have seen such seeds spiralling down from a tree in the autumn; they catch the wind and spread out over a wide area. The butterfly mine is shaped in a very similar way and with the same intent. It is dropped from the air and gently spirals down to earth. Thousands are dropped at a time and spread out over a large area. Normally blue/green but sometimes in camouflage colours, many are still to be found in places such as Afghanistan. These mines look unusual and are attractive to children in particular. Keep well clear of such mines and never attempt to touch, squeeze or pick one up. If you do, it will explode.



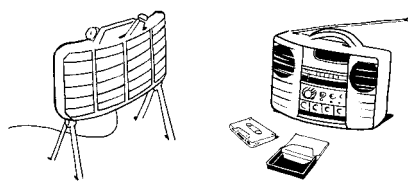
**The bounding or jumping mine.** This can be attached to a trip wire made of very fine metal or nylon. You walk into the wire and it is pulled taut, thus triggering the mine. Or you touch the mine itself and the pressure triggers it. Once triggered, the mine springs up to about waist height and then explodes, spreading fragments in all directions. In shape it resembles a soup can. These mines have the same dark colours as the other AP mines. They are normally partially covered, with just the top sticking out of the ground. On the top they have a small spike or a number of spikes, which if touched set them off.




**The fragmentation mine.** Normally linked to a trip wire, this mine is attached to a wooden or metal spigot and placed in the ground so that the mine remains stationary about 20 cm above the surface. Why fragmentation? Because the metal casing of the mine has perpendicular grooves in it, dividing it into neat squares. The surface thus looks very much like a bar of chocolate divided into squares. When it explodes, the casing breaks at the weakest point – along the criss-cross of grooves – and razor-sharp squares of metal fly in all directions.



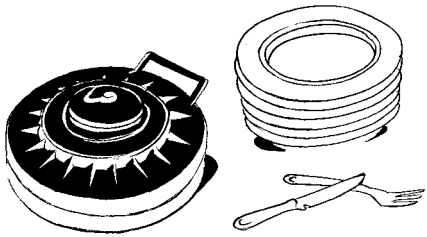
**The claymore AP mine.** Though a fragmentation mine, this is shaped somewhat differently. It is convex because it is designed to spread its fragments in a limited direction, or arc, of



around 60 degrees. Instead of a casing with chocolate-bar grooves, small metal balls are packed into explosive and encased in plastic. The mine (the same colour as the others) sits just above the ground on its own set of legs. It can be set off by a trip wire or by an electrical detonation-command wire. This wire stretching away from the AP mine can run for a considerable distance. The person setting off the mine waits in safety for his target to appear, touches the wire to a battery or presses a switch, and off it goes, showering its target with high-speed metal balls.

## Anti-tank mines

Anti-tank mines are designed to disable heavy vehicles. They are normally laid in fairly large numbers to achieve their aim. Quite often you will see up to six of them laid across roads or kept at the ready near road-blocks so that they can be placed across if necessary. In an active conflict zone you can be fairly sure that mines of this type will be kept under observation or, as the military say, "covered by fire". They are valuable weapons and they are protecting valuable routes or objectives. The people who planted them won't let the location of such mines out of their sight; otherwise, someone might come along and remove them! The point is this: when in an active zone never assume that you are not being observed, even if you can't see anyone. **Do not go too close to such mines. And, obviously, never, on any account, touch them.** You could get an immediate and highly unwelcome response. In areas where the fighting is finished, the mines may remain in place though their guardians are long gone. Nevertheless, you should not yield to the temptation to interfere with or even touch them.



Some important features of anti-tank mines:

- much larger than anti-personnel mines, with a diameter/length of up to 300 mm (the size of a dinner plate) and a height of up to 110 mm;
- square or round in shape;
- made of plastic or metal;

- coloured the same as AP mines, i.e. dark, camouflaged;
- detonated by the pressure of a heavy vehicle passing over them (just remember, your vehicle is heavy!);
- occasionally detonated by a tilt rod sticking out from the top of the mine and sometimes attached to trip wires.

Just as these mines are normally watched, they are also further protected by surrounding the area with anti-personnel mines – another good reason to keep away.

They may have anti-handling devices built into them: touch them and they go... off!

## Dealing with the mine threat

So now we have some idea of what mines are and what they look like, how should we deal with them?

- **Do not touch any mine – stay well clear of it.**
- **Do not use your radio, mobile phone or SATCOM in close proximity (within 100 metres) to a mine**. The radio frequency you are using might cause the mine to detonate. This applies to all such devices: booby traps, improvised devices, unexploded military ordnance, etc.
- If you come across mines, try to leave some indication to others of their presence. **Make sure it is placed at a safe distance from the mined area**. Inform other organizations and the local people of the mines' location.

**The golden rule is that mines and humanitarian volunteers don't mix**. We avoid them. But how?

## Dealing with anti-personnel mines

Always seek local advice if moving into a new area or one that has been the scene of recent fighting.

There are numerous sources of advice:

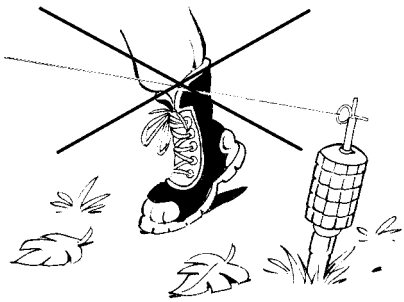
- your colleagues, local staff (especially the drivers);
- local authorities, including the police and military;
- public transport organizations;
- other NGOs and UN personnel;
- check-points;
- hospitals;
- and, especially, the local population.

Take a guide with you: a local administrator, for example. Ideally your guide should be in his own vehicle driving in front, so that he is responsible for you. If he doesn't want to go, then don't go yourself!

You should not use a track or road that is new to you unless you are certain others have used it recently. Try not to be the first vehicle to take a road in the morning. Wait and see whether locals are using it; then go. Always wear your seat belt. Avoid driving at night.

**Never attempt to move or even touch a mine.**

Remember, mines can be attached to trip wires. So don't even attempt a closer look.



If you are in the lead vehicle and you spot mines, stop immediately and inform the second vehicle.

If you are unable to stop in time and find yourself in an area of anti-personnel mines, the best plan is to carefully reverse out, if possible retracing your tracks. Your vehicle will give you a certain amount of protection. With a team member looking out the rear window and guiding you, reverse out slowly and carefully.

**Do not try to turn your vehicle round. Do not get out of your vehicle.**

If a road is obviously blocked by something (for example, a tree or a vehicle) in a likely mined area, **do not be tempted to drive onto the verge or hard shoulder to get by.** It could contain mines. Turn back.

## The most dangerous areas in terms of anti-personnel mines

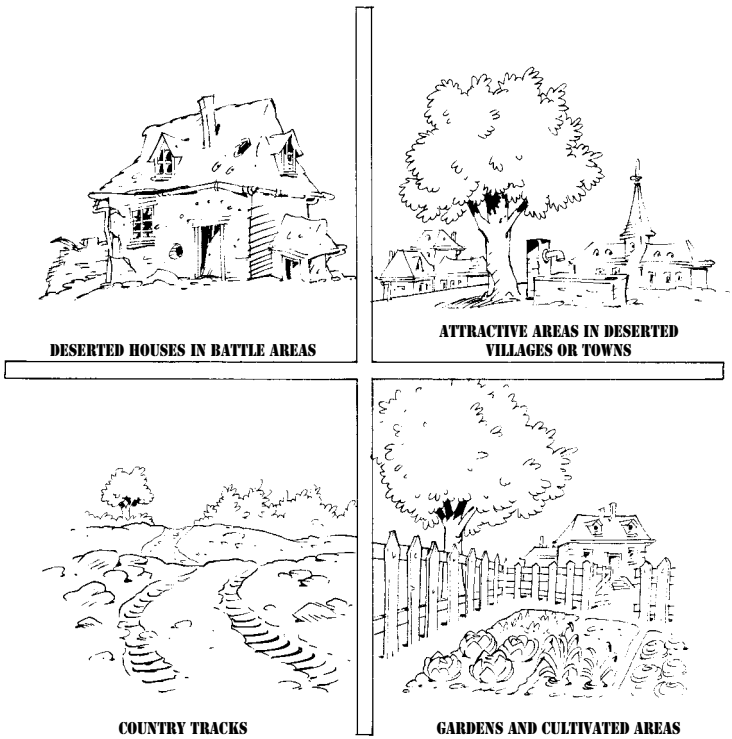
Obvious old front-line positions, barricades or defensive positions are dangerous. These are not difficult to identify. If they were used by the military and have now been discarded, you will see the debris of battle: empty bullet cases, rubble, and possibly wrecked buildings nearby. You might notice barbed wire, bunkers or earthworks. These areas could be infested with mines. They are easily recognizable and should be avoided at all times. **Do not drive**

**or walk through such areas.** Go back and find an alternative route (unless, of course, the roads are open and used regularly).

**Deserted houses in battle areas.** You should not be tempted to explore them or use them as a place to relieve yourself when "nature calls". Such houses may have been used in defence of a town or village and could be surrounded by anti-personnel mines.

**Attractive areas in deserted villages or towns.** Mines may well have been left in places likely to be attractive to the forces sent to the town to clear them. Such an attractive place could be an

**DANGER AREAS FOR ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES**



undamaged house, for example. The mines would not be placed at the front entrance – that would be too obvious – but at a side window perhaps, or by a well, or under a shady tree. The mine might be attached by a trip wire to an attractive object. Ask yourself why such an object is still there! A wise person will leave it alone.

**Country tracks.** These are very dangerous. Mines could have been laid some time ago and be very difficult to see. Keep to main or secondary paved roads.

**Gardens and cultivated areas.** Mines could well have been laid to provide protection and early warning for the inhabitants or defenders. They could also be placed in tempting orchards, vineyards or vegetable plots.

Be on your guard against "cleared areas". The military may declare an area clear of mines, but they cannot be 100% certain. Roads, main squares, etc. might be clear but it requires an enormous number of men to physically clear even a small village. In one country I visited, three anti-personnel mines (as of the time I was there) had been found in the garden of an NGO house. It had been declared "cleared".

Remember, if you identify a mined area or are informed of one, spread the information to all interested parties including, obviously, other humanitarian organizations in your area. Record the information and mark it on your maps.

## Dealing with anti-tank mines

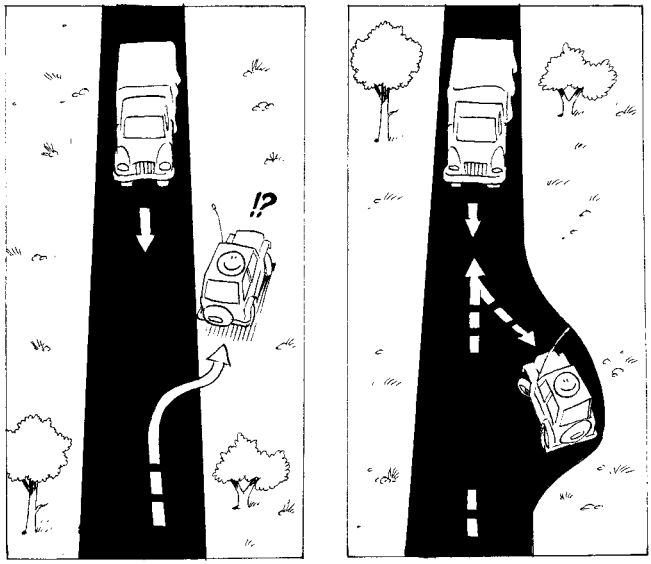
Unfortunately, we cannot say that because they are much bigger than anti-personnel mines, we can easily identify anti-tank mines and so avoid them. Such mines are often buried just under the surface. Mines left in place for some time could be overgrown with vegetation and very difficult to see. What are the guidelines?

Verify routes beforehand from local sources.

It may seem strange, perhaps, but in some areas (sadly too few) anti-tank minefields are marked. This has been done by the military for their own security. Surely this gives the game away to their opponents? Not really: the mines are still there, they still pose a risk, they still have to be dealt with. Secrecy is thus not all that important. Sometimes a minefield is marked out and made to look real when in fact nothing is there. "Dummy" or "phoney" minefields, as they are called, are a common ruse of war. So get to know the signs used to indicate minefields, and simply avoid the areas. In newly occupied areas, new signs may well have been put up by the military. This is the case in Sri Lanka, for example. Locally devised signs are also quite common. Erected by the local population, they inform others of the danger. In Armenia, red flags are placed on sticks and held in place by stones on the side of the road. Once again, local knowledge is important.

If you see anti-tank mines on what appears to be an unmanned check-point, **do not attempt to move them yourself.** You can be absolutely certain that you are being observed. If they want you to pass, they will come to you. If you wait a short time and no one appears, you should assume that you are not welcome and turn back. Always remember that these anti-tank mines could themselves be surrounded by anti-personnel mines. They could also have some form of anti-handling device built into them.

Vitally important: **do not be tempted to move onto the verge of the road to bypass obvious mines, to get past some other obstacle or even to allow another vehicle through.** As already mentioned, an




adjustment is required to your normal behaviour. A natural reaction at home might well be to pull over on a difficult or narrow road to let a fellow traveller get by. In mined areas, forget it! You should not be polite and pull onto the verge. The verges may contain mines. If necessary, reverse back to a wider area and let the other vehicle pass. In such an area near Sukhumi, in Abkhazia, I demonstrated to a delegate the unique etiquette involved. The area was obviously mined. A large vehicle was approaching us. We simply stopped towards the side of the tarmac and beckoned him on. He absolutely refused to go onto the verge. Smiling broadly, he asked us to reverse up to a wider section of the road and then passed us. He knew the dangers involved in his area. This is an important guideline. Indeed, it is **a rule for mined areas.**

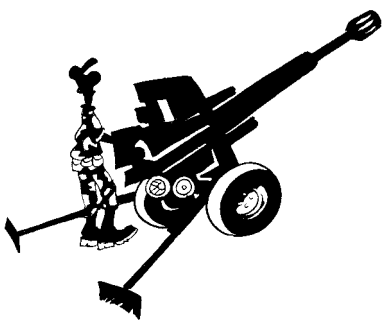
Old front-line areas and trench systems are a major threat. Mines could be buried in the debris of battle. Avoid such areas completely.

## THE THREAT FROM ARTILLERY, ROCKETS AND MORTAR FIRE

Let us now look at the threat posed to you in areas where artillery, mortar and rocket fire might be used. We will very briefly describe the various weapons. Much more important to you is a basic idea of how they are used. With this knowledge you will then see how best to minimize the risk.

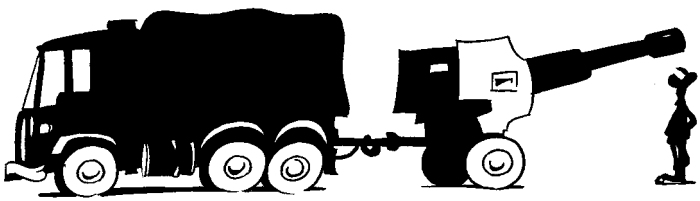
### Artillery

The term "artillery" covers a rather wide range of weapons. For our purposes it is sufficient to be aware of the following types of artillery.

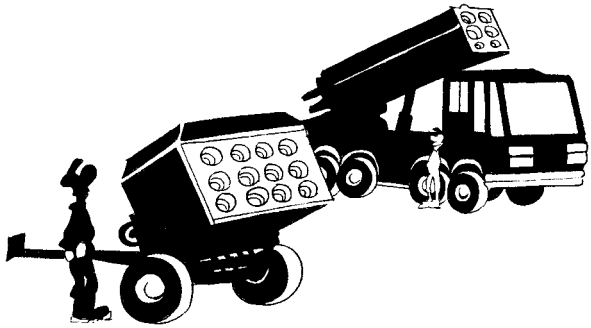


**Howitzers.** These are light, manoeuvrable weapons with a calibre of between 76 mm and 105 mm. Howitzers can fire at ranges up to 13 km.

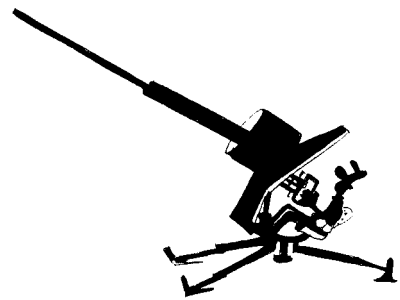
**Heavy artillery.** These much larger weapons are normally towed behind trucks. In some cases the gun is self-propelled and for all intents and purposes looks like a tank. The calibre is from 120 mm to 155 mm. Ranges extend to 24 km.



**Rocket launchers.** These come in small portable varieties, with a range of 8 km, to much larger self-propelled versions that can fire to 50 km. Multiple rocket launchers consist of rows of barrels that can put down very heavy concentrations of fire. These weapons are also called "grads". They contain rows of launching tubes so as to saturate an entire area. Often they simply fire single rounds. The weapon is not accurate. It is very difficult to predict exactly where the rockets will land.



**Anti-aircraft guns.** These are mentioned because, though designed to shoot down aircraft, they can also be used against targets on the ground. Owing to the excellent sights and accuracy of these weapons, they pose a very dangerous threat. Generally they are light and portable. Some have multiple barrels. Their range is from 2 km for the smaller versions and up to 8.5 km for the larger, towed guns. The rounds used are from 20 mm to 40 mm in calibre.



## Mortars

These weapons are generally much lighter and more portable than those described already.

The most common mortars are the 80 mm, with a range of 6 km, and the 120 mm, with a similar range but much larger and more effective shell.

## How these weapons are used

With the exception of the anti-aircraft guns, all the artillery and mortars are what we call "indirect" fire weapons. They rely for their effect, and indeed their crews' safety, on the use of firing positions far away from their targets, which are often well protected or even dug in. The shells can be fired over hills and also at considerable ranges.

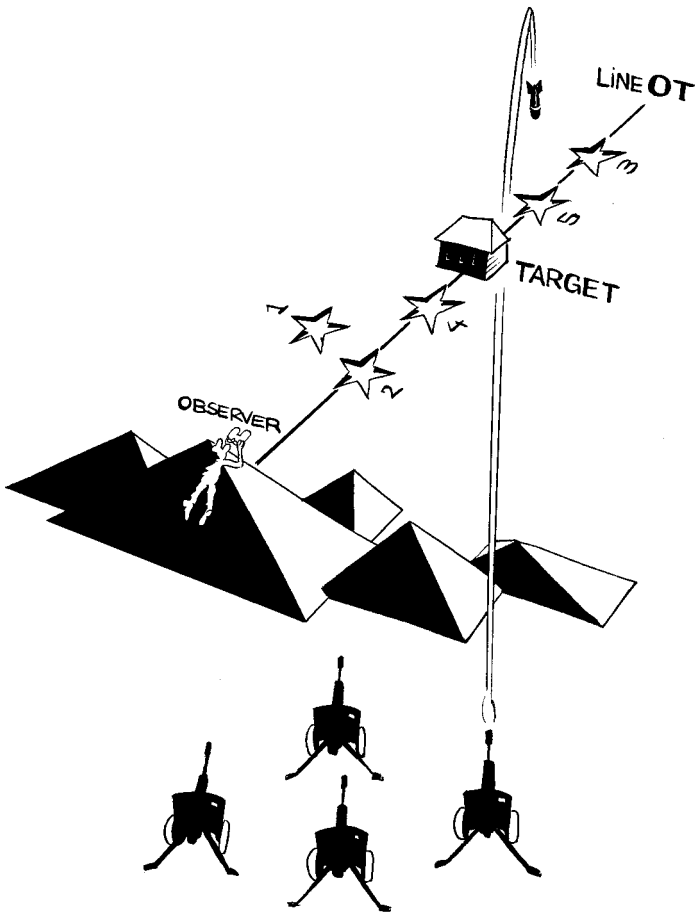
It is the indirect nature of artillery that is of paramount importance to you. By understanding how it is used, you are in a much better position to comprehend the threat and thereby deal with it. Very briefly, artillery and mortar fire is used in two ways.

One type of fire is "observed" fire, that is, firing over a long distance but with observers positioned forward of the guns and acting as their eyes in the target vicinity. They have radio contact with the gun positions and basically guide the guns onto the target.

How do they do this? In very much the same way you or I might guide a friend's car into a parking lot: "Go left a bit. Go right a bit. OK, now back up. Whoops, too far. Go forward a bit," etc. The artillery observer will first direct the shells onto the right *line*, i.e. the line as he sees it from his position to the target. Two or more rounds might well be fired, with corrections to the right or left as appropriate to get "on line".

Once he has the desired line, or direction, the artillery man must start correcting along that line to obtain the exact range so that the shells will hit the target. Since it is not possible to measure

accurately how far beyond or in front of the target a round lands, a process of "bracketing" is used. This involves simply beginning with a long bracket of 400-800 metres (two shells separated by that distance falling beyond and in front of the target respectively), and then splitting the bracket progressively until a short bracket of 100 metres or a shell on target is obtained.



Having used these single shells to adjust his fire, the artillery man fires a number of shells onto the target.

Bear in mind that this process could entail a number of shells landing before the actual target is reached.

The other type of fire is "predicted" fire, which is much less accurate. Here the target position is worked out from a map. As accurate a grid reference as possible is given to the guns. Account is taken of wind direction, air pressure, etc. The variables are computed, the sights adjusted and the guns fire. Though less accurate, this is nevertheless effective if all you really want to do is harass a town or village. By computing the coordinates for the centre of the town, you have a good chance of making your shells land close enough to cause damage and fear.

## Dealing with the artillery and mortar threat

By knowing how it is used, you now already know how to reduce the risk. Not convinced? Let's briefly summarize.

If you hear or see artillery fire in your vicinity, remember that it may simply be the *first rounds* of a series (observed fire). Or it may just be inaccurate predicted fire. **But do not wait for the next shells before taking cover or evasive action.**

It is most unlikely that you will be the target but you can surely see that a shell could land on your vehicle, house or office by accident, simply as part of the adjusting process.

*If you are driving in open country,* look for good ground cover. A ditch or small culvert will provide good protection. Always endeavour to think ahead when travelling in front-line areas: "Where could I take cover if artillery fire started now?" There is no time for hesitation. Decide quickly what to do and do it.

*If you are in a vehicle,* you have two options.

*If the fire is effective,* that is, if it is very close to you (50-100 m), the best course of action is to get out and take cover off the road. Lie flat in a ditch or behind the hardest cover available. **Do not lie under your vehicle,** for that offers very little protection and the vehicle itself could be the target.

*If the fire is some distance away* and not in your immediate path, that is, off to the left or right, the best course of action is to drive on as quickly as you can and clear the area. If the next rounds appear to be getting closer then, as before, get out and find good hard ground cover.

*If you are in your delegation or house* and artillery rounds start landing on your town or village, the best advice is to take cover *immediately* in your safe area or shelter. Why? Because you have no way of knowing where the next rounds will land. Your building may not be the eventual target but it could very easily be part of the adjusting procedure described above. It is not brave to just carry on working. In fact it is extremely foolhardy. Just go to the shelter and encourage all others to come with you. In 5-10 minutes it will be evident whether or not it is safe to return to work. Take note as well of what local people are doing. If they are running for shelter, do the same.

## THE THREAT FROM SNIPER AND RIFLE FIRE

We will now look at the danger posed by sniper and rifle fire. I have grouped the two together because our response to the threat posed by either should generally be much the same. The other reason is that there is a great deal of confusion between so-called snipers and ordinary combatants firing their guns. Once again, by explaining the threat perhaps we can lay to rest some of the mystique and confusion surrounding the subject and be better able to cope with it.

I will explain the term sniper, describe the tactics a sniper may use and then offer advice on how to deal with this very real threat to your safety.

### WHAT IS A SNIPER?

In military terms a sniper is a highly skilled and highly trained rifleman. Not only is he chosen for his shooting skills, a sniper must also have a particular temperament to carry out his task.

Essentially he acts independently in areas of extreme risk. He must be a very cool, self-assured character and an expert at field craft, camouflage and concealment. His task is normally to make his way stealthily to front-line or other target positions. He then hides and

awaits his target. He might have to remain in place for many days. His training takes about three months. After that he is required to continuously practise his skills. In military terms he is very much an expert and tends to be employed only at this one task.

## What can a sniper achieve?

You could argue that one man or a small team of snipers is not going to achieve a great deal in the context of modern warfare. However, they have two major purposes.

The first is to attack high-value targets such as an enemy commander known to frequently travel a certain route, or valuable equipment such as missile launchers (in which case the goal would be to damage the equipment or kill the driver of the launch vehicle).

Their second purpose is to have a disruptive effect – psychologically and otherwise – on their opponents. For obvious reasons their aim will be to remain concealed for as long as possible. Shots from nowhere that maim or kill will be extremely disconcerting to an opponent. In normal circumstances we can see that such highly trained personnel are not tasked with directly targeting humanitarian workers.

## What equipment does a sniper use?

A true sniper rifle is unlike most of the automatic and semi-automatic weapons you see at check-points and so on. It is more like a hunting rifle – much longer than an AK-47, for example. A sniper rifle normally has a telescopic sight. The most up-to-date sniper rifles are heavy, long weapons. They may be combined with a bipod rest at the front and with night-vision sights. They have an effective range of up to 1,000 m. Some rarer and more specialized rifles have an effective range of 1,400 m.

The ammunition is also of a highly specialized long-range type. It Sometimes has armour-piercing and explosive capability.

## Dealing with the sniper threat

Having described the typical sniper, let us now look at how to deal with the threat he poses to our work. The first and most important point is that by no means are all snipers the highly skilled individuals described above. We tend to generalize when describing rifle fire

against us. Though it is simpler to describe it as sniper fire, in many cases we are actually talking about a relatively untrained militiaman firing at us or in our general direction. Whilst real enough, the threat is by no means as great as that from a truly professional sniper. This is important to remember, for there is a great difference in the ability of the two to actually cause us harm. This distinction should have a marked effect on our reaction to them.

You should not be lulled by the foregoing into a false sense of security. There may well be trained snipers about. The hunter-turned-soldier also knows exactly how to use his weapon and its sights.

**Our first consideration must always be to avoid known sniper areas.**

However, we must accept that even with good prior information and planning we might still be confronted with such a threat. It would be very reassuring if we could simply list a string of points on how to deal with it, but the matter is not that simple. Every situation is different from every other. For this reason, strict rules might do more harm than good. Therefore, here are some general guidelines.

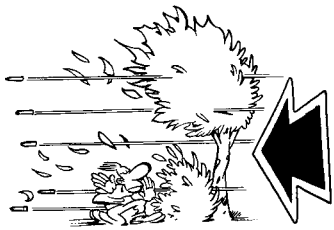
You should develop your terrain awareness. This applies equally to sniper and rifle fire, to artillery, to mortar and to similar threats. It means being fully aware of your surroundings at all times in areas of high risk. Train yourself always to be thinking ahead about where you could take cover or go if you were fired on. With practice, this is perfectly possible. Try it on your next field trip. Without getting paranoid, just quietly ask yourself: "What if we were fired on now? What would my immediate reaction be?" Look around and then say to yourself: "Well, that would be the best place to go and so that's what I would do." Repeat this a few times per trip until the process becomes routine.

*If you are in a vehicle or out in the open* and you come under fire, when at all possible (when you or your driver can still drive the vehicle), drive on at the highest possible speed. It is already difficult to hit a stationary target; the faster it moves, the more difficult it becomes.

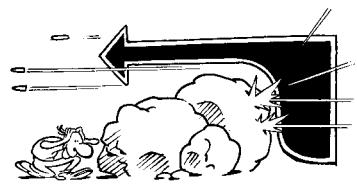
If the firing is coming from the front, obviously you should veer left or right up a side street (in a town) or, if in the countryside, off to the side and get out, putting the vehicle between you and the source of firing for added protection and concealment. Reversing or turning

round is seldom the best course of action. It slows you down and presents an easier target. If possible, avoid this.

If the driver has been shot or if your vehicle has been immobilized and you are obviously coming under fire, you have little option but to dive for cover off the road. Put the vehicle between you and the sniper and take the first available bit of protection you can find. You have no time to be choosy. Hard cover – a ditch, rocks or a building – is obviously best. This gives you protection from fire and from view. The next best is cover from view only. It is better than nothing.

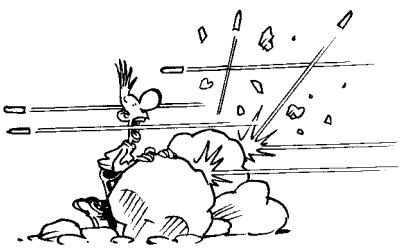


SOFT COVER



HARD COVER

Having found cover, **do not be tempted to look up to see what is going on,** or at least not initially. A sniper may have seen where you went to ground and just be waiting for you to pop your head up. Rather, once you have taken cover, crawl a few metres one way or the other while maintaining your cover. This will conceal your position.



In risky areas forget your tape deck and your Walkman. They make it really difficult to hear gunfire. Drive with your window

slightly open, even in the winter, as this makes outside sounds more audible and provides early warning of trouble.

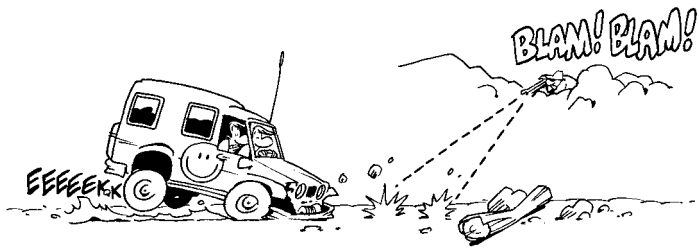

*If you are in a building,* stay there! **Do not allow yourself to be curious and look out the window.** Lie down or, ideally, crawl to a place where there are at least two walls between you and the direction from which the sound of gunfire is coming.

If you can get to your shelter safely, then go there and wait for the shooting to stop. If you cannot go there safely, place yourself for maximum protection under a staircase or somewhere in the middle of the building.

### Warning shots

Shots might be fired close to you to warn you off. We cannot possibly imagine every scenario, but this has happened to me. We were approaching a small village to assess the needs of the inhabitants. As we reached the outskirts we saw mines at the side of the road. We stopped short of the mines. Almost immediately shots rang out over our heads. We quickly left the vehicle and took cover in a house. The shots were very close but not actually aimed at us. How did we know? Apart from the fact that neither we nor the vehicle got hit, we could hear that very distinctive "crack" of the bullet passing overhead. (This "crack", like the noise made by a whip, is a clear indication that a bullet is very close to you, close

enough so that you should not argue the point. Hissing or whining sounds do represent passing bullets, but they are some distance from you.) The combination of unmanned mines and the shots fired gave us the clear message that we were not welcome. There were no more shots and after 15 minutes we ran to our vehicle and reversed away from the mines and returned to base. A clear warning was issued by firing close to us. You should recognize the combination of signs – though they may not always be the same – and not press on.




In summary:

- Avoid sniper zones.
- Develop an awareness of cover and use it if needed.
- Always think ahead.
- If attacked, and if at all possible, drive through.
- Be decisive.
- Don't be curious.
- Learn to recognize warning shots and don't press on regardless of them.

## THE AMBUSH THREAT

An ambush is an attack by persons lying in wait in a concealed position. It is an extremely dangerous, life-threatening situation. The guidelines given below should be regarded very much as measures of last resort. Perhaps the first point to consider as a means of avoiding ambushes is simply this: If there is the threat of our being deliberately targeted in this way, should we be pushing our luck by travelling in the first place? If the threat assessment suggests attacks of this nature, it would be foolhardy to press on

regardless. In most cases, ambushes are deliberate operations, carefully planned and coordinated.

## Dealing with the ambush threat

Our threat assessments might not always be as perfect as we would wish, so what other precautions can we sensibly take to reduce the ambush risk?

- **Do not travel close to vehicles of the armed or security forces.** They might well be the targets and if you are too close, you will be caught up in the ensuing gunfight.
- Avoid travelling by night.
- If travel really is absolutely necessary, at least try to go in a pair of vehicles or in a convoy. It might sound a little callous, but in a life-or-death situation where travel is vital (for example, a medical evacuation), if one vehicle is ambushed, at least the others might stand some chance of survival.
- Whenever travelling it is wise to wear flak jackets and helmets if they have been issued to your organization.
- If you encounter a deliberate obstacle or a hasty road-block and you have time to stop, do so and assess the situation. If you are in doubt, turn back. However, a professional ambush will be sited in such a way as to preclude this option: at a sharp bend in the road or just over the brow of a hill, so that you have no warning.
- Be aware of the ''ground'', especially in likely ambush country. Always strive to note possible escape routes by vehicle or on foot. Ask yourself what would be likely terrain for an ambush. Here are some examples (remember, those setting the ambush want to achieve surprise, but they also want to ensure *they* have an escape route if things go wrong):
  - sharp bend at the top of a steep hill;
  - rough stretch of road which forces you to slow down;
  - wooded area providing good cover for escape.

## Reacting to an ambush

If you are caught in a deliberate ambush, it goes without saying that you are in an extremely dangerous situation. Your options might be limited to the following:

- If you are the lead vehicle (the one directly targeted), the only real option you have is to drive through, if at all possible, as fast as your vehicle will go, with passengers taking cover by lying flat. It might be possible to drive off the road to the right or left, but this will be unlikely if the ambush has been skilfully sited.
- If the driver is hit or the vehicle is immobilized, the remaining passengers should attempt to ''bomb-burst'' (scatter) out of the vehicle in as many directions as possible and keep going until they are well away from the danger area.
- If you are the second vehicle (i.e. if you are not yet directly targeted), then you should immediately remove yourself from the danger area (known as the ''killing zone'') either by reversing, turning left or right or simply stopping and allowing your passengers to get out and scatter away from the danger.

### Encountering a recent ambush

It is possible that you could arrive at the scene of a recent ambush, for example, one intended to attack security forces or set by security forces against opposition groups. It goes without saying that you will not be too welcome on the scene. This too is an extremely dangerous situation. There is the obvious danger of being caught up in the crossfire of an ongoing firefight. Recommendations:

- If possible, stop well short of the incident.
- Reverse out of the area.
- If it is too late to do this, your only real option is to get out of the vehicle and take cover.
- When the situation has calmed down, indicate your neutrality as best you can: by obviously surrendering with your hands up and by indicating your organization's logo/flag.
- If the situation is less dangerous, that is, if an ambush or similar incident has obviously just recently taken place and you arrive on the scene, stop and comply with instructions given by those in control.

## The threat from improvised explosive devices

Improvised explosive devices are essentially "home-made". The term covers a range of devices similar to small grenades, anti-

personnel mines, larger mines of the claymore type made up of metal fragments and explosive. Some groups simply do not have the money to buy ready-made equipment. In other cases, importing military equipment might be very difficult for them. In both cases, they make their own. In its simplest form, such a device is a stick of dynamite with some nails taped around it for added impact – just like a firecracker. You simply light the fuse and throw it at your opponent, his car or his house.

Moving up the scale, we have devices more akin to mines, but definitely not the same shape or necessarily the same size. There are small devices with a few ounces of explosive, such as wooden-cased anti-personnel mines. These are pressure-operated. You step on the lid of the box, which closes and thus completes an electrical circuit. The batteries inside them set off the detonator, followed by the main charge. In many parts of the world we hear of large bombs, sometimes containing hundreds of kilos of explosive. The explosive can be something as common as sacks of fertilizer which, when detonated, create quite a violent explosion. These large bombs might be placed by the side of the road, under it in a culvert, in a parked car or in a vehicle being driven by suicide bombers. Some devices are even hung from the branches of trees overhanging a road.

## Dealing with the threat from improvised explosive devices

Let us now put the threat from these very nasty devices into perspective. For the smaller anti-personnel mines, the rules are exactly the same as those covered in the earlier section on that subject. So we can now turn to the others and look first at why and how these devices are normally used.

Why? Looking at it from the point of view of the parties to a conflict, the following question arises. Do they really want to waste valuable manpower and scarce equipment on directly targeting humanitarian volunteers? Why bother? They can simply stop your car or enter your house if they want to convey their sentiments. The point is that you are most unlikely to be directly targeted by the larger bombs described above. They have been put in place, with considerable skill and sometimes weeks of pre-reconnaissance to determine patterns of movement, in order to directly target their

opponents in a vulnerable or isolated spot: a culvert under a road down which the adversary regularly passes in convoy, or in a car parked opposite a military post or police station in a town.

How? We have mentioned the sort of targets against which these devices might be used. But how are they triggered? They can be triggered in many ways. They can be linked to a timing device – simply set to go off at a certain time, to match a known event or just to give time for the person laying the device to get away. They can be linked to a trip wire stretched across a road or path. More often they are linked to some form of "command" system, such as an electric wire stretching hundreds of metres. The person setting off the device is well out of the way, concealed but with a clear view of his target area. He waits until the target approaches the right spot and then detonates the bomb by sending an electric charge from a battery through the wire to the device. Another detonation method is an electronic signal. (This is more sophisticated but nevertheless common in my experience.) In this case there is a small transmitter in the hands of the bomber and a receiver placed on the device itself. It is very similar to the equipment used for radio-controlled model aircraft or cars. Such devices can be purchased in toy or model shops. The bomber again waits for his target from a camouflaged position. He sends a radio signal to the receiver, which sets off the detonator and thus the bomb.

Another "how" that is important to remember is the fact that these bombs are often set in pairs. The idea is to set one off and then wait before setting off the second. Why? The reason is that people – particularly the adversary – will naturally gather at the scene of the first explosion. Vehicles, troops, etc. will arrive to deal with the incident. When enough have gathered (and if they are not professional enough to take precautions), they form an even better target, and so the second device is set off.

## Avoiding or minimizing the danger of improvised explosive devices

Let us now see how we can minimize the threat, as we have done with other weapons.

But first, consider this. Apart from the destruction caused by these bombs, there is a very important side effect. The death toll from these devices has not been high only among the military or security-

force targets but also among the civilian population. There are two reasons for this. Often civilians are in the area when the device is set off. But more unfortunate than this is the fact that, following an explosion, the security forces in the near vicinity tend to open fire at "suspects" and civilians are caught in the crossfire.

Remember, there is no reason why you should face a direct threat from these devices, especially the larger bombs. The only problem, therefore, is if you happen to be in the area when one goes off. To minimize the bad-luck factor, you should take the following precautions.

Try to distance your vehicle from security-force convoys or even single security-force vehicles. Just slow down and let them get well ahead of you. If you are mixed up with the target vehicles or just behind them, I am afraid the bomber will pay you little regard. He has his mission and will try his best to complete it.

If you happen to be in the vicinity of an explosion, avoid, at least initially, your natural impulse to go closer and investigate or assist. The best advice is to stop, get out of your vehicle and take cover on the ground or at the side of the road. Why? You know the answer: to avoid the crossfire referred to above.

Keep down until the situation has stabilized. Then, by all means do what you can to help the victims. Blindly following an impulse to help might get you into the middle of a gunfight and cause unnecessary danger. Turning down a side road is a possibility but it wastes time, as does trying to reverse away. Remember, you are very exposed in your four-wheel-drive vehicle. The other argument in favour of caution in these situations is the danger of a secondary device. If you go to the scene of a first blast, you expose yourself to the risk of a second bomb. As I said at the beginning, these are only guidelines; I cannot tell you not to assist or to get involved. You are now better aware of the dangers. Each incident will have its own unique set of circumstances. *You* must decide.

## THE GRENADE THREAT

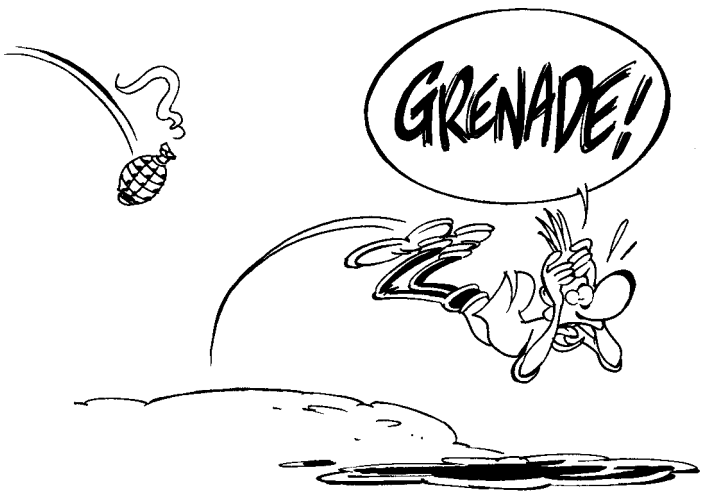
The grenade is well known and does not need a lengthy explanation. Essentially, it is a small bomb thrown by hand or fired from a hand-held launcher, such as the "rocket-propelled grenade". The variety thrown by hand has a built-in fuse delay to provide a degree of safety to the person throwing. This allows him to take cover before

it explodes. Rocket-propelled grenades tend to explode on impact, that is, with no delay. Again, the risk of being directly targeted with these weapons is small, very much the same as that posed by improvised explosive devices: bad luck in being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

## Avoiding grenades

If you find yourself near a grenade incident, take the same action as described above. Get out of your vehicle, take cover and avoid the possibility of indiscriminate fire.

If a hand grenade is thrown at you, and you are lucky enough to have seen it coming or hitting the ground, remember that you do have a very short time before it explodes. The blast from hand grenades tends to travel upwards and outwards, in shape of an inverted cone. Therefore, the best action you can take in the brief seconds available to you is immediately to throw yourself flat on the ground or into a ditch, or dive behind some form of cover. **Do not run for cover. You have to get down immediately.** Shout ''Grenade!'' to warn your colleagues of the danger. It is also useful to cover your ears! Following the explosion, it might be wise to wait a minute or so to ensure that no more grenades have been thrown. If the grenade fails to detonate, keep well away from it.



Grills across a window or a metal chain link fence are useful in protecting against grenades. Either they will simply bounce back or they will go off at a safe distance from you.

## THE THREAT FROM BOOBY TRAPS

A booby trap is an apparently harmless object designed or adapted to kill or injure by functioning unexpectedly when a person disturbs or approaches it or performs an apparently safe act with it (for example, opening a letter or a door, or picking up an attractive article lying on the ground). The device is deliberately hidden inside or disguised as a harmless object.

Withdrawing troops might well place booby traps in all sorts of places to try and catch out their adversaries. Booby traps might be left on paths, by wells, in houses or just lying in the open and attached to an appealing object which a soldier would find it difficult to resist touching. In Armenia, I recall seeing a rather tempting-looking trombone lying on a road in a recently deserted town. Many had passed it by but no one had attempted a tune!

### AVOIDING BOOBY TRAPS

**Do not explore deserted houses, towns or villages.** Sadly, in many parts of the world today you will see absolute ghost towns. You should not be tempted to snoop around or use the houses to "answer the call of nature".

**Do not touch apparently interesting objects lying innocently on the ground.** Just leave them alone.

## THE THREAT FROM UNEXPLODED MILITARY ORDNANCE (UXO)

In conflict areas you are bound to come across all types of military ordnance (ammunition) that have been used and then failed to work properly, have been simply discarded by retreating forces or even have just been dropped or lost by a soldier. Such objects range from aircraft bombs through artillery shells to grenades and on down to rifle ammunition. These days ''UXO'' is also referred to as ''explosive remnants of war''. All should be treated with extreme caution. Ammunition that has been fired could be in a very unstable state. The fuse of a shell or bomb, for example, might simply require

a little nudge from you to complete its task! A grenade lying on the ground might need only to be picked up for its safety pin to fall out and... BANG!

On one occasion, in the relative calm of a regional base, I was asked by others to check whether the military ammunition that Mr X had in his office cupboard was really safe. I approached Mr X in a fairly relaxed manner, not wanting to disclose my source of information or to appear to be checking up on him. Diplomatically, I therefore came straight to the point!

"I hear you have something interesting in your cupboard."

"Oh, you have heard about my excellent chocolates?"

"Well, no, but now I have."

Putting this useful information temporarily at the back of my mind, I returned to the point.

"I was actually more interested in the ammunition you are keeping safe."

"Oh that. Yes, here it is. Why, is there a problem?"

A problem! The offending article just happened to be a hand grenade, primed and ready to go. Not only that but the safety pin, normally splayed at the end for safety until you actually want to use it, was fully flattened.

"Interesting," I said nonchalantly, but rather wishing to break into a run. "Where did you get this from?"

"Oh, a driver brought it to me three months ago and I just didn't really know what to do with it so I kept it in my cupboard."

So this lethal grenade had travelled some 300 km in a driver's bag, had lain in a cupboard, and had been shown to and handled by a number of people. All this when even the slightest jar could have loosened the safety pin and caused the thing to explode in the middle of a busy office. I tell the story to show you what some people are capable of and ask you please not to be so stupid. Rather, let this true tale illustrate the dangers involved in being inquisitive about matters and objects that do not concern you.

## Unexploded cluster bombs

A particularly nasty form of UXO is the unexploded cluster bomb. Cluster bombs (CBUs) are small explosive bomblets carried in a larger canister that opens in mid-air, scattering them over a wide area. These bomblets can be delivered by aircraft, missile or artillery. A typical aircraft-delivered cluster bomb currently in use, the CBU-87, contains 202 such bomblets. They are yellow cylinders about the size of a soda can – 20 cm long and 6 cm across. CBUs are used against tanks, other vehicles and concentrations of infantry.

The target area covered by the bomblets depends on the spin rate and canister-opening height (at which the bomblets disperse). A single bomb might cover an area about 100 by 50 metres with its bomblets. Because cluster bombs disperse widely and are difficult to aim precisely, they are especially dangerous when used near civilian areas. In addition, they are prone to failure. If the container opens at the wrong height, if the bomblets do not fuse properly, if trees break the descent or if they land on soft ground or desert, they might not detonate on impact. This high ''dud'' rate (estimated to be 7 to 10 per cent) results in the bomblets becoming *de facto* anti-personnel mines, which can explode at the slightest touch. The volatility and high explosive content of these bomblets makes them much more dangerous than many other type of unexploded ordnance.

A further problem is that children are sometimes attracted to the bomblets' bright colours and interesting shapes. Many are coloured yellow which, for example, was exactly the same as the yellow food aid parcels dropped during the war in Afghanistan.

These cluster bombs have been used in the wars in Vietnam, Laos and more recently in the 1991 Gulf war and 2003 Iraq war, and during the 1999 Kosovo war. The danger zones, broad as they might be, are pretty well known. Local knowledge will be invaluable in determining risk areas. **Again, as with all UXO, do not be inquisitive. Leave these things alone.** But certainly report and warn others of any cluster bomb you see.

## Avoiding unexploded military ordnance

The objects we are talking about are easily recognizable. **There is no excuse for interfering with them or touching them.**

If you see them, just move away. But *do report them to your colleagues and to all other interested parties.*

## THE THREAT FROM DEPLETED URANIUM MUNITIONS

In recent conflicts such as Iraq and Kosovo, depleted uranium (DU) munitions have been used.[22] These are armour-piercing devices usually fired from tanks, aircraft or helicopters. The most commonly used DU munitions are called penetrators and have the size and shape of a large cigar. They do not explode on impact – instead they ignite and burn through the armour. In the process, a very fine uranium-oxide dust is dispersed. Most of this dust will settle within 50 metres of the point of impact. Therefore, the immediate vicinity of armoured vehicles and other targets could have high concentrations of uranium-oxide dust. But it is also possible that the dust will be carried further by the wind.

### AVOIDING DEPLETED URANIUM MUNITIONS

As yet, little is known with certainty about effects of breathing, ingesting or other exposure to DU dust. There have been claims of a significant increase in certain types of cancers and other health problems, but these have not been conclusively verified by experts.[23] The best advice is therefore to keep away from any military target that might possibly have been hit by DU munitions. Remember: they might well have high concentrations of uranium-oxide in their immediate vicinity. **Do not explore burnt-out tanks or vehicles. Do not pick up shrapnel, spent rounds or other debris** (such as military equipment). It is advisable to wash your skin and clothing if you think you might have been contaminated with dust from such sites.

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[22] A few websites provide details of where DU has been used in conflict. Websites containing helpful information are: http://www.unep.ch/balkans/ (UNEP), http://www.nato.int/du/ (NATO) and US Department of Defense websites regarding the Gulf and Iraq wars.

[23] The possible health effects of exposure to DU have been compiled by WHO and are available on their website at http://www.who.int/ionizing_radiation/env/du/en.

## THE THREAT FROM THE AIR

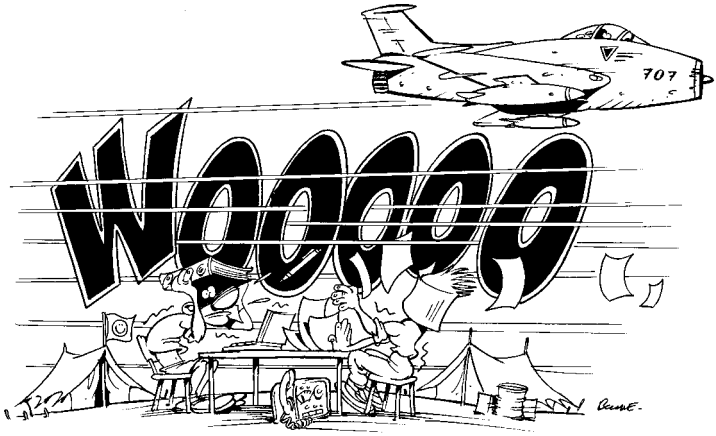
Aerial attack is perhaps the most frightening and most difficult danger to deal with. It can come in two forms: from "fixed-wing aircraft" or from helicopters. The real problem is the speed and therefore the lack of warning. With high-speed jets, the first sign of trouble might be the deafening roar as the aircraft actually flies over your position. Even with slower helicopters, when they fly low following the ground's contours, their sound is muffled and warning can be very short. Once again, direct targeting of humanitarian organizations is most unlikely. Pilots are expensive to train and the aircraft they fly are extremely valuable. They will be used against priority military targets and not wasted. So is there a problem? Unfortunately, yes.

In highly sophisticated air forces, precision bombing and other attacks are a speciality. The forces involved have the necessary equipment and, equally important, the training needed to use that equipment. Often these days we hear of laser-guided bombs, etc. As we know from the Gulf war, however, even the most advanced precision weapons are not fool-proof: mistakes are made and civilians, unfortunately, killed. In the lower levels of conflict there are simply no such weapons or the training to use them. Aircraft might drop bombs on a town from high altitude to avoid missiles. The results on the ground will therefore be entirely indiscriminate. Often, the bombs used are designed less to destroy precise military targets than to create terror and panic in the population as a whole. Examples are incendiary bombs and cluster bombs containing hundreds of smaller bomblets that scatter and create extensive damage.

### Dealing with the threat from the air

In areas where aircraft or helicopters are in use, the best protection is a well-constructed shelter, ideally purpose-built and made of concrete (see section on shelters) or installed in the cellar of a building. As the Gulf war proved, even the strongest concrete bunkers will not protect you from a direct hit but they will certainly give excellent protection from "close calls" and from the effect of blast.

I have said that warning of this type of threat is extremely short. There are, however, certain signs that have proved useful in my experience and I offer them to you here.



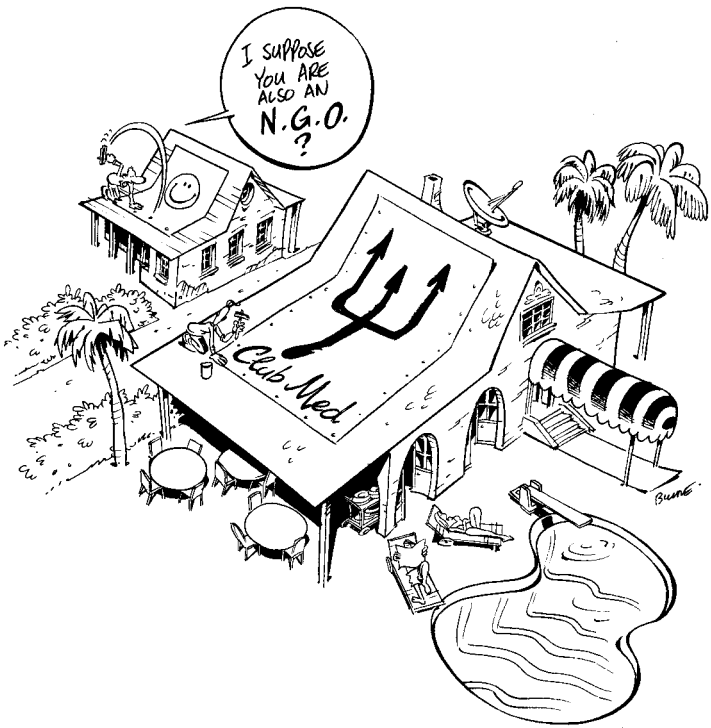

The local population are acutely aware of the dangers in areas which have been attacked already. They develop an uncanny "sixth sense", especially the children. They can hear the aircraft well before we do and they run for shelter. You cannot possibly miss this warning. You should not wait to ask questions: no one will answer you. Just follow suit and head for the nearest hard shelter.

Warning might also come from the military or civilian authorities. Air-raid sirens are an obvious case in point. If you are new to an area, you might not even recognize the official warnings. So ask on arrival about the threat and what – if any – warnings are given. Other signs might be the firing into the air of anti-aircraft guns or even missiles. You probably won't see what they are firing at but they know. **Do not waste your time looking up to try and spot the target, just run for cover.**

It has been my experience in a hostile air environment at the lower levels of conflict that often a small aircraft – a "spotter plane" – appears a few minutes before the actual aerial attack. These planes guide the fighter aircraft onto their target. Again, the local population know exactly what they signify and take the warning. You should do exactly the same.

A further experience, useful in the lower levels of conflict in which aircraft and training are not very sophisticated, is that pilots will often first overfly the town or position since they need to identify their target before they can attack it. **Do not wait for their second pass. Take cover immediately.**

Prior notification of your delegation's position as well as that of your houses, warehouses, etc. is a very sensible aid to security in these situations. The parties to the conflict should have your locations clearly plotted on their operations maps. This certainly should help you. Pilots are carefully briefed before they carry out their missions. Your positions will be marked on their maps as well. Attack runs can be planned to avoid you. Of course, if they don't know where you are then you can't expect them to take you into consideration.



Marking buildings with your organization's logo is also important, but only really as "the icing on the cake". Detailed prior notification is the essential thing. A pilot has a lot on his mind when he is committed to battle, not least dodging missiles and bullets. He cannot be expected to notice every possible detail. However, a large, clear sign painted or draped on a roof will certainly help to confirm his briefing and flight plan regarding your exact location.

We have concentrated on you taking cover. **Do not forget your colleagues. Warn them as well.** Devise some simple word that lets everyone know the danger. You don't have time for a detailed explanation or conversation on the radio. Agree on a single word and ensure that everyone knows it means "Air attack! Take cover!" Repeat it three or four times on your way to shelter (e.g. "Hawk! Hawk! Hawk!"). Radio operators at base should also try their best to inform other NGOs. You might agree amongst your NGO community on a common emergency frequency to pass these and similar messages. With UN forces in the area, an emergency frequency is common practice.

We have now covered the main threats to our work in some detail. Remember, we have offered *guidelines only* on how to deal with them. Every situation will have its own features. Knowing the details of the various threats, you should be in a much better position to recognize the warning signs and therefore minimize the risk they pose. Hopefully this knowledge has helped dispel a certain amount of fear of the unknown.

*CHAPTER 5*

# THE THREAT FROM CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL, RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR HAZARDS

**It must be stressed at the outset that this subject is among the most rapidly changing of humanitarian security issues.** Organizations may well have their own detailed procedures for dealing with these threats. What follows represents (at the time of going to press) the best available set of *guidelines (not rules)* from acknowledged experts in their field.

## A BIT OF PERSPECTIVE

It is important to place the threat from chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) hazards in its proper context. You will already have realized from the rest of this book that conflict situations feature risks from a wide range of ''conventional'' hazards. It is possible that the mystique surrounding CBRN issues, and the dread nature of the use of this type of weapon, can skew the perception of the real risks involved. Things like road accidents and threats to personal safety and security are common and must be the focus of attention in most, if not all, assignments to conflict areas. History shows that the use of CBRN weapons and agents is ''a low-probability event'', although when it does occur it is likely to have a huge impact. So it's best to be prepared! In addition to the threat from weapons, we must also be aware of similar threats arising from industrial accidents.

## TYPES OF CBRN THREAT

The types of CBRN threat are indeed many and diverse.

### Chemical warfare agents

A wide range of chemical warfare agents are available, and they tend to be released as aerosols, vapours or gases after being delivered in missiles, shells or mortar bombs, or dropped from aircraft. They enter the body through inhalation, ingestion or, in some cases, absorption through the skin. Whilst some (such as

nerve agents) are designed to kill rapidly, others are intended to cause incapacitation or even (for example, riot-control agents) to cause irritation. Some agents are persistent in nature, sticking to surfaces (including skin) where they remain active, while releasing gas into the air, thus causing a prolonged hazard. Those designed to kill quickly will disperse very rapidly. Most have about the same, or greater, density as air, so they tend to gather in cellars or low-lying areas. It is said that some agents are detectable by their smell, but this method is not fool-proof, and obviously not recommended!

### Toxic industrial chemicals

The production and efficient delivery of chemical warfare agents is a comparatively expensive and sophisticated matter, and is therefore a realistic option only for a relatively small range of users. It would, however, be simple to use readily available industrial chemicals like chlorine or phosgene (both of which were effective weapons during the First World War). There is a huge range of chemicals that could potentially be misused in this way, so specific detection and protective measures are difficult to predict and provide.

### Biological warfare agents

Working in conflict zones is in any case likely to place you at risk from a range of naturally occurring diseases. But the use of biological warfare agents is also possible. Again, the production and delivery of truly weapon-grade biological agents is not quite as simple as some novels would have you believe! Nevertheless, the possible use of anthrax spores even by non-State actors should be taken seriously. Bio-warfare agents are selected to be either contagious (the disease is caused by person-to-person contact) or non-contagious. An example of the former is smallpox, of the latter anthrax. Clearly, the first type is of great concern, since not only those initially infected will fall victim to the agent. Like chemical weapons, these agents can be delivered by a number of different means. Usually they enter the body by means of inhalation, although some could be used to contaminate food and water supplies. Others could even be delivered by infected insects, such as mosquitoes!

### Radiological and nuclear incidents

Although it is unlikely that anyone other than weapons-producing States would acquire nuclear bombs, suitcase-size nuclear and

radiological devices have occasionally gone missing from military storage areas. And conventional weapons could be used to attack nuclear power stations or radioactive waste-storage or -processing facilities. There is also the potential use of a radiological dispersal device – a ''dirty bomb''. Nuclear devices are, of course, lethal – *very* lethal – though the effect of radiological devices is not always necessarily fatal, depending on the type, its size and your distance from it.

## PROTECTING AGAINST THE CBRN THREAT

Reducing the threat from CBRN is a complex matter and involves use of a number of measures, most of which are not available to humanitarian staff but rather confined to military and civil defence units. The nature of the threat means that dealing with it will probably be beyond the means and resources of most humanitarian organizations. They would do well to seek the advice of skilled professional experts for the necessary training. Without this training and advice, it is recommended that organizations not operate in environments where CBRN is a threat. Nevertheless, there are still some measures that can be taken to reduce the risk for individuals, especially if they are on the periphery of the weapon-release zone. The rest of this chapter will concentrate on those measures. It must be read (like the rest of this book) with full regard to the policies and procedures of your specific organization.

### Assessing the threat

Gauging the likelihood of use and the variety of CBRN weapons should be part of any pre-deployment risk assessment for any specific location. Steps can then be taken to reduce that risk. Given the secrecy surrounding this matter at the international and national levels, such assessment may be difficult. And surprise attacks are always possible. This reality should be included in your contingency planning.

### Detection

CBRN agents are essentially undetectable by the senses alone (except for the obvious flash of light and blast from a nuclear device!). So CBRN incidents can occur without a warning alert or

immediate detection of a toxic or other hazard. Whilst specialist detection and survey equipment is available, it tends to be confined to military and civil defence organizations, it is expensive and complex, and training and practice are needed to use it and interpret the results.

Most chemical warfare agents are essentially odourless, and they may not cause immediately obvious symptoms. In the case of biological warfare agents, the onset of symptoms may be generic (e.g. fevers and general illness that could be confused with a wide range of naturally occurring diseases). In this case, days or weeks might be needed to detect and confirm the type of disease outbreak. Sudden outbreaks of unusual disease might be a sign of bio-warfare, but this is a very specialized area of work.

Radiation is invisible, colourless and tasteless. Indications of exposure may not be immediately apparent owing to delayed onset of symptoms.

Indications that a CBRN incident *may* have occurred include:

- large number of victims;
- victims suffer from nausea, breathing difficulty, convulsions and disorientation;
- birds and insects drop from the sky;
- unusual dead or dying animals or insects;
- unusual liquid, spray, powder or vapour;
- droplets or oily films on surfaces;
- unexplained odours (bitter almonds, peach kernels, newly mown hay or green grass);
- unusual or unauthorized spraying in the area;
- smell and signs of explosives or smoke;
- receipt of suspicious mail or packages emitting odours or containing white powder.

The greater the number of the above-mentioned signs you detect, the more likely it is that a CBRN incident has taken place. You may also hear alarm sirens or shouted warnings. In most military forces, the banging together of metal objects and the simultaneous shouting of ''Gas! Gas! Gas!'' is a standard CBRN incident warning. An even bigger clue is if military personnel in your area start to put on protective equipment.

## Medical countermeasures

A number of medical substances can be used to minimize the effects of some CBRN agents. (However, many of these are available only to military personnel.) If you are issued with any of these countermeasures, **you must use them only as instructed by your organization.**

A range of vaccinations is available against some bio-warfare agents. These need to be administered well beforehand if they are to be effective. (Vaccinations against naturally occurring diseases should obviously also be taken.) You can also be issued with antibiotics that you can take if a bio-warfare incident is imminent or has occurred.

You could be given potassium iodate tablets to take following certain radiological exposures, but they will not work for all such incidents.

As far as chemical warfare is concerned, pre-treatment tablets and auto-injectors are available to help counteract the effects of nerve agents, but these need careful supervision and training to be safe and effective.

## Immediate action drills

In situations involving chemical warfare and toxic industrial chemicals, it is essential to take immediate action in order to prevent yourself becoming a casualty and thus be able to assist others. **You must:**

- Put on your personal protective equipment (see below) if you have it with you. If you don't have it, *immediately* cover your nose and mouth with a clean cloth soaked in uncontaminated water.
- Avoid touching other people.
- Remove and discard obviously contaminated clothing.
- Stay clear of any suspected hazards, especially fire, smoke or vapour clouds.
- Minimize time spent near any suspected source of danger.
- Maximize distance from any suspected source of danger.
- Your evacuation route should take into account wind direction. Move rapidly upwind from the source, or away

from any plume of gas or smoke. Be aware that a change in wind conditions can cause the danger zone to shift.
- If in a vehicle, drive five miles upwind and then reassess the situation.
- If you are in your CBRN ''safe room'' and it has not been breached, then stay there at least until the immediate threat appears to have passed. Otherwise, evacuate immediately as set out above.

**In the case of a nuclear incident, you must immediately drop to cover**. **Do not look at the flash of the explosion, and do not get up until the blast waves have moved over you** (there will be two of these, with a gap between).

In any situation involving radiation (obviously including the aftermath of a nuclear event), protect yourself according to the following principles:
- time – minimize the time spent near the source of radiation;
- distance – increase distance between you and the source;
- shielding – place heavy material between you and the source.

## Communal protective measures

In Chapters 7 and 8 you will be introduced to the concept of locating, reinforcing and stocking accommodation that is secure against a number of threats. You also need to consider specific requirements if a CBRN threat is suspected. Some of these seem to contradict previous advice, which underscores the requirement to assess overt or suspected CBRN threats during your planning and preparation.

To create a safe room, **you must:**
- Choose a location (if the expected threat is predominantly chemical) above ground (actually at the highest possible level). For situations where the threats are mostly of radiation or conventional means of warfare, choose a location below ground level (preferably with thick walls). Glass, concrete, metal and other dense materials will help shield you from radiation.
- Select an inner room (as close as possible to the centre of a building) with the least number of windows and doors and, ideally, with access to a bathroom.

- Close and seal all windows and exterior doors with duct tape and plastic sheeting. Block all keyholes and cracks with cotton wool or wet rags and tape, using a water-soaked cloth to seal gaps under doors.
- Shut down air-conditioning vents or flows, fans and central heating systems.

In addition to the equipment and procedures discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, **you must:**

- Ensure that you have waterproof clothing, long-sleeved shirts, long trousers, raincoats, rubber boots and butyl rubber gloves.
- Ensure that you have several weeks' supply of water and non-perishable food in sealed containers.
- Keep important items in sealed plastic bags.

## Personal protective equipment

Military personnel and civil defence teams are issued with and are trained to use specialized personal protective equipment. These tend to consist of at least a combination of respirators with specifically designed filtration canisters utilizing active carbon and particulate filters, plus butyl gloves, over-boots and special over-garments. These may not be available to humanitarian workers.

At the minimum, ''escape rucksacks'' should be prepared, and they should at all times be with, or within easy reach of, personnel, especially during periods of heightened alert. **They must contain:**

- a waterproof poncho (or adapted plastic bin bag);
- a gas mask;
- butyl gloves;
- chemical detector papers (if you can get them), i.e. papers that change colour in the presence of some chemical warfare agents.

Whatever personal protective equipment is available, you don't want to be putting it on for the first time when it's required for the real thing. To be effective, and for you to have confidence in its use, **you must:**

- Practise – against the clock – putting on and taking off your personal protective equipment. If it is to be effective, your respirator must be on within nine seconds of a warning being

received. Once it's on, shout ''Gas! Gas! Gas!''. This will not only warn your colleagues of the incident but also clear any gas from inside your respirator. By the way, if you have a beard (or even a couple of days unshaved growth) your respirator will be breached and let in agent.

- If at all possible, put on and take off your personal protective equipment together with another person. This way you can help each other ensure that you have a perfect fit and decontaminate each other, if necessary.

## Decontamination

In the event of a known or suspected chemical or radiological incident, you should decontaminate yourself *before* entering the safe room. To be effective, this requires planning (so that appropriate equipment/chemicals are in place) and practice.

**For decontamination you must have:**

- a shower (or a shower bag is fine), soap (ideally liquid soap), a sponge or soft brush, and bleach;

- a clean change of clothing (kept in plastic bags) for each person;
- plastic rubbish bags and labels for contaminated clothing.

To decontaminate yourself or colleagues, **you must:**

- Immediately wipe your face and repeatedly flush eyes using large amounts of clean water.
- Remove all contaminated clothing carefully so as not to spread any particles onto your face or skin. Place it in a plastic bag and seal it.
- Use a ''rinse-wipe-rinse'' method: wash the entire body from top to toe, including hair, with a mild body-soap solution and a secure water source. If possible use cold water to minimize evaporation of the agent.
- If water is scarce, sprinkle talcum powder or even flour on the affected skin area, wait 30 seconds, then brush it off with a rag or gauze pad, using butyl rubber gloves if possible.
- *In extremis,* rub dry earth to absorb the contaminant, or take clothes off and roll around in the dirt, then wash and change clothing if possible.
- Put on clean clothing.
- Destroy heavily contaminated clothing by incinerating it. Items with minimal contamination can be washed in hot water.

*CHAPTER 6*

# ADDITIONAL AIDS TO YOUR SAFETY AND SECURITY

In this section we will move away from the details of particular weapons and take a look at some broader issues that have an impact on your security.

How should we deal with the local factions, the armed forces and the people we are working with? What is their view of us? In a similar vein, I will offer some guidelines for dealing with the inevitable road-blocks and check-points you will encounter. Planning your field work is important from a security viewpoint. I will give you some advice on how to use this important tool and then end with some thoughts on the best ways to respond to incidents and how to report correctly on them.

## HOW ARE WE VIEWED BY THE ARMED FORCES AND SECURITY FORCES, LOCAL FACTIONS AND THE LOCAL POPULATION? HOW DO THEY BEHAVE TOWARDS US?

*"O wad [would] some power the giftie gie us*
*To see ourselves as others see us."*
Robert Burns

How we are viewed is a very broad subject to cover in a few paragraphs. Moreover, every country naturally has its own unique characteristics. All we can do is to try to encapsulate common themes and attitudes based on experience and close observation of how we tend to behave and people's reaction to our behaviour.

Having been on mission in most of the present conflict zones, my honest opinion is that there is great respect for the work of humanitarian organizations. To be blunt, and perhaps a bit cynical, one could say – bearing in mind the risks we take, and the places we go – that if this respect did not exist, we and organizations like us would have suffered much higher losses.

There have indeed been tragic incidents in recent years — some a result of poor security practices, others no doubt the result of direct targeting. But it is important to keep these matters in proportion. Violent shooting and related incidents are commonplace in our larger home cities. Such incidents relating to humanitarian volunteers are thankfully much rarer.

Generally speaking, people respect those who are trying to help them. *But it is important to realize that there are certain areas of the world where the behaviour described below simply does not apply. Your organization will brief you on such specific areas and the risks involved.* The civilian population understand that the assistance you provide is often vital to their survival. They need your help and respect you for offering it. As for the military and other armed groups, this respect runs even deeper. Because they know so well the risks you are taking, they often have a special respect bordering on admiration — if not incredulity — at your courage in aiding them and their people, though they might seldom show this openly.

Let us look more closely at both the military and civilian perspective on our work.

## The view of the professional soldier

Most soldiers in organized armed forces (professional soldiers, in other words) have a degree of self-respect that inhibits them from attacking unarmed and unthreatening targets. One can, of course, argue that there have been countless examples of attacks on unarmed civilians. This is true, but in the soldier's view they are simply the enemy: "They have attacked my people so I will attack theirs."

In a number of war-torn countries, the soldiers have grown up in a world where bravery in the face of lethal danger is commonplace. They respect such courage in both their comrades and their adversary, and in humanitarian workers as well.

In no way could you be considered an enemy and in many ways you will be considered a friend. Soldiers will look upon the lone humanitarian vehicle venturing into their war zone as an act of extreme bravery, and respect its occupants accordingly. To injure or kill such people would be unseemly to them. And it would be unlikely to gain them much respect from their comrades or

superiors; on the contrary, it would be viewed as humiliating and degrading.

Soldiers do have a basic sense of right and wrong, of honour. In their minds, there is nobility in fighting and possibly dying for their country or their particular cause. There is equal honour and nobility in showing compassion for their defeated foe or for those actively assisting the victims. In many parts of the world, religion reinforces these traits.

Firing in front of a vehicle or close to people on foot might, on the other hand, prove amusing sport and be fun to relate over the camp fire at night! This perhaps explains many a "close shave" that some of us have had in various conflict zones.


DELEGATE EXPRESSING HIS HAPPINESS


SOLDIER EXPRESSING HIS HAPPINESS

## Complications facing the soldier in the conflict zone

In the mid- and low-intensity levels of conflict described earlier, the armed forces and other armed groups involved are usually remarkably disorganized. They simply do not have the equipment or training to operate with true efficiency.

It is worth remembering that the conflicts in many countries involve relatively new armies or newly formed armed groups. They may well have the outward trappings of efficiency (uniforms, new weapons, etc.) but the soldiers are essentially inexperienced, and so are their

commanders. It often amounts virtually to a medieval type of warfare albeit fought with modern weapons: throughout a large area, small militias or simple gangs are fighting under very loose control from above. Any "unit" can do more or less what it wants and independent war-lords follow their own agendas, which usually amount to controlling their own areas and getting rich. Their allegiance to the overall strategic plan of the larger grouping is tenuous, to say the least. Alliances might well shift on an almost daily basis, depending on what personal or very local gains can be achieved.

"So what has all this got to do with me?" I hear you ask.

Well, it is quite important because it explains one of the difficult aspects of modern conflict which you must unfortunately deal with and therefore have to understand.

It explains, for example, why promises made or detailed notifications signed by military headquarters may not be respected on the ground. This has a direct impact on your operations and should be carefully considered. In practical terms it means that prior agreements are bound to be unreliable. The military might simply not have the procedures in place or the means of communication needed to guarantee that the necessary messages or orders get through. At the end of the day it is the soldier in charge of the checkpoint who decides whether you pass or not. Despite all your efforts, all your careful planning, he might not have been informed of your mission.

Recently I experienced a good example of this lack of command, control and communication. A large relief convoy had been meticulously planned. The delegation was assured by all parties that a front-line crossing was definitely approved and that a cease-fire had been arranged. Unfortunately, one mortar section on a hill above the crossing point had not received the message and fired on us. The next day the party concerned accepted full responsibility for the message not getting through.

How do we deal with this exasperating state of affairs? There is no straightforward or fool-proof answer. To begin with, of course, you should plan thoroughly, notify the relevant authorities and seek the necessary agreements — all this well in advance. This can only help the process of communication and provides a much better chance

of the soldier on the ground cooperating, because he is the one who really matters. Secondly, double-check that your request has actually been forwarded. Keep phoning, keep talking, be a nuisance. It is a tedious process but a necessary one given the problems faced by the military. A hastily laid plan in this type of conflict is simply foolhardy. Commanders will not have time to react and those on the ground will have no idea what you are doing. It is these "gung-ho/Rambo" operations that result in failure or security incidents. Avoid them by optimizing and understanding your relationship with the military; you will do much to help both them and yourself, and ultimately the victims you are trying to assist.

## Notable exceptions

While I believe that the above description of soldiers — and their view of us — is accurate, there will unfortunately always be exceptions. A drunken soldier may open fire. Combine the drink with drugs and you have a real problem. A soldier may have a particular grudge against your organization or another. He may feel that you are helping his enemy or that you were not quick enough in providing medical aid to his village; you sacked his brother, who was your security guard, etc., etc. It is by no means easy for you to please everyone all the time. You should not forget that individual combatants may also be thoroughly confused as to who or what you are. They see many NGOs and many logos and it is easy to mix them up. Therefore, the sins or omissions of other organizations might well end up affecting you!

And then some people are just completely out of control. For example, ground transport is in short supply, so your all-terrain vehicle is an extremely attractive item. Hijacking is a distinct possibility although it does not necessarily go hand in hand with injury to the occupants. These so-called bandits or "uncontrolled elements" exist; they are the perilous exceptions. Some can be avoided by means of common sense; the risks can be reduced. If a particular gang favours a particular village or locality, avoid driving through it. **Do not prolong a discussion with a drunken soldier** as it is almost guaranteed to end in disaster! You are bound to say something by mistake that will upset or offend him. He may very well want to talk, but try to offer some pleasantry or a cigarette, and then drive on, ideally in a crouched position!

## Private security companies

Private security companies are assuming greater prominence in modern conflict. One now hears expressions like ''the privatization of war''. These companies can be contracted to carry out a variety of tasks, for example, actual military operations, security at key installations and other guard duties, intelligence-gathering, training of military or police personnel and logistics.

Humanitarian organizations are increasingly turning to private security firms for such services as armed guards, or ''close protection'' (CP) as it is increasingly known, to enhance their security or simply to be able to continue their work.

It should be understood that using these services can blur an organization's image, with confusion in the minds of the belligerents, who might well be trying to distinguish between combatants and civilians, in particular humanitarian organizations. A possible source of additional problems and severe embarrassment is that armed-protection staff are normally retired military or police personnel. They might well lack the cultural sensitivity needed for humanitarian work and they might be ill at ease working alongside civilians. Clearly, you need to have confidence in the CP teams you employ. A cross-line operation involving armed escorts might well lead to an unwanted gunfight simply because your escorts are misidentified as a threat or, worse, because – unbeknownst to you – they do indeed belong to the other side. (This was a particular problem in Somalia.) The fact that the military sometimes drive around in civilian clothes and white four-wheel-drive vehicles adds to the confusion of roles between NGOs and the military, and affects the security of humanitarian workers.

The use of armed guards and CP must be considered with care by humanitarian organizations. In some cases their use can actually increase the threat rather than diminishing it. They can certainly confuse our intended message of neutrality and impartiality. You will have to accept that whatever instructions you issue to them, armed guards and close protection teams will undoubtedly have their own ideas about when to open fire. This could cause you problems. Account should also be taken of the loyalty of armed guards, i.e. from whom they ultimately take their orders.

Pragmatism is required: there will be circumstances in which private security agents will be needed. But if their use is not very carefully planned and controlled, things can go wrong. We must have clear procedures for the selection of the best and most reliable security company. We must ensure that they are acceptable to the local community. Procedures for working together should be addressed *before* deployment. So, why not arrange joint training with these teams? In this way both you and they will have a much better understanding of each other and how you should operate together.

## Military protection

In some circumstances, humanitarian organizations might rely on the protection of military forces rather than private security companies. And in some circumstances, using military protection to deliver aid may not present any immediate danger for a humanitarian organization. Over the longer term, however, such collaboration with military authorities may prove detrimental as it can weaken the core humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. At the outset of the war in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, humanitarian organizations thought nothing of accepting military protection for their convoys. But as the situation developed and the UN came to be viewed by some as a party to the conflict and convoys were then attacked, the humanitarians changed their minds.

## Promoting your organization

I have highlighted the anarchic nature of modern conflicts and described security and safety in terms of a relationship. We must try to understand and develop our relationship with the military and indeed the civilian population in order to reduce the threat to our security.

Active promotion, or advertising, is an important tool in this, by which I mean telling people who we are and what we are doing for them. Believe it or not, few will know any of this. It is your duty to explain, whenever you can, just what you represent. You can do this at check-points, in villages, over a cup of tea or in formal briefings. It all helps spread the word and makes your job safer.

## Weapons in your vehicle

It goes without saying that you will not be armed. **But this also means never allowing armed soldiers into your vehicle.** It is easy to write that this should never be allowed; it is sometimes less easy to achieve it in the heat of a tense, chaotic situation on the ground. The first lesson that any soldier is taught is that his weapon is his best friend and he should never be parted from it. It is useful to remember this when you are telling them that they cannot enter your vehicle or your buildings with their guns. Accepting this rule is really quite difficult for them. But it is vital wherever possible to apply this principle. Otherwise, you will simply be viewed as an arms conveyor, siding with whomever. You will immediately lose your neutral and impartial position. And it can be dangerous in a more immediate time-frame: you take some armed men in your vehicle, you encounter their adversaries, and there you are in the middle of a gunfight – definitely not a good idea. If you remain firm and *explain why,* you will be respected.

Once, just as we were driving up to a check-point, a severe gun battle erupted. Before our eyes a soldier was hit. Here we were, a humanitarian vehicle on the spot to assist the victim. So far, so good. The other soldiers immediately dragged their wounded comrade to our vehicle and with little discussion everyone understood that our task was to turn back and take him to the local hospital. The real problem then emerged. Some of his buddies naturally wanted to come with him, to protect him and administer

first aid. This was fine except that they also insisted on bringing their guns. This was hardly the ideal time or place for lengthy explanations about weapons in our vehicles. Feelings were running high and tempers were, as you might expect, at breaking point. But believe it or not (and sometimes in retrospect I have trouble believing it myself), they concurred. The wounded soldier and one comrade got into the vehicle unarmed, and off we went to the hospital. It can work even in the most difficult circumstances. And it results from knowledge of and respect for the way we work. Advertising our role beforehand must have played a part in this case. They knew us and our working methods.

However, if guns are turned on you in this situation, frankly you have little option but to comply. If you don't, the least that will happen is that your vehicle will be commandeered as a necessity of war. It is also worth considering in these situations whether the road you will take, even with a wounded and unarmed soldier on board, is in fact clear of any of his opponents. If not, you will not only endanger his life but also place yourself in a dangerous and embarrassing position.

## Warnings or obstruction?

Sometimes it is very difficult to distinguish between warnings and obstruction. If you are warned by the armed forces not to go to a certain area or complete a certain task, it puts you in a difficult position. They might simply want to ensure that you do not take supplies to their enemies. On the other hand, it might represent genuine advice for your protection. The effect on your operations is much the same in either case. You should think twice before pressing on. Deliberately ignoring warnings or advice is not sensible unless you have a very good feel for the situation and the parties concerned. If they are determined that you should not proceed, they will stop you somehow – if not on the spot, then possibly later, with obvious risks for your safety. The advice may well be based on their knowledge of an impending operation and they do not want you harmed or in the way.

On balance, my advice would be to take this sort of advice or warning, turn back and reassess the situation the next day. Did an incident take place along the proposed route? Was there indeed a threat? If the answer is "yes", well and good. If the warning was nonsense meant simply to prevent your work, protest to the

authorities at the highest possible level. And next time, you should not be so easily dissuaded.

## The civilian outlook

Many of the points made above regarding relationships and advertising apply just as much to your dealings with civilians. The dividing line between combatants and non-combatants is a little blurred these days: the camel boy may be armed to the teeth. In general terms, however, the civilian population will respect you. You are their lifeline and you are putting yourself at risk to help them. They realize this and will not wish to bite the hand that feeds them. They are, however, in a desperate situation; basic survival needs sometimes take precedence and can put you in danger. Your vehicles, your property and your warehouses are valuable and might well be targeted by civilians simply to survive. You should not expect them to have much of an idea as to what you represent or what you can do for them. Many will simply regard you as doctors. Once again, explain and advertise your role and function. It will help a great deal.

Try to blend as much as possible with local culture and traditions. Beware of taboos about fraternizing with the opposite sex. It could get you into severe trouble or cause acute embarrassment.

You might have attention thrust upon you by attractive members of the opposite sex, whether you welcome this attention or not. Is this because of your charm and good looks? Or is it because you represent a life-line, a way out? Or is it perhaps a way for some group or other to obtain information about your activities? Just be aware of the possible reasons and think about these very personal matters carefully. You could actually be putting yourself and your colleagues at risk.

Get to know as much as you can about the local people. Remember, they were once proud and self-sufficient but are now likely to be dejected and desperate. You should neither impose your culture on them nor be condescending or arrogant. Be polite. You should not rush; take time to explain and listen. You are important to them because of what you represent, not necessarily because of your individual qualities. Try not to get carried away with your own importance. It annoys people and humiliates them even more.

Dress down, not up. I don't mean that you have to be scruffy. But if one is dirt-poor, it is a bit trying to have to deal with people who wear Versace sunglasses, Hermes scarves and Cashmere sweaters! It will not endear you to them. (But if nothing else, it will make you a suitable target for theft.) A plastic watch, a simple sweater or shirt, some slacks and strong shoes are all that you require. Leave the rest for your return to Geneva, London or wherever. They will be more appreciated there.


Try not to make the dividing line between you and them more obvious than necessary. Remember, you have a generator; they don't even have a candle. Sure, you need the generator for your own sanity, for your radios and basic comforts. No problem; but is it necessary to have it on all night when the rest of your town is in darkness? Have the occasional party by all means, but do turn down your hi-fi. It is not necessary for the whole town to hear it. Be discreet about your supplies of alcohol, cigarettes, chocolate and other goodies! Their presence should not be more obvious than it has to be. I am not suggesting that you live like a hermit or suffer as those you are supporting. That would be completely counter-productive. You need some comfort and relaxation in order to carry on with your work. Just keep things in proportion, and try not to show off. If you do, you will be noticed. Respect for you will diminish and the less scrupulous members of the population will soon ensure that your goodies are shared out more fairly!

## CHECK-POINTS/ROAD-BLOCKS

Check-points and road-blocks mean the same thing: a manned position on the road designed to monitor and control movement in a

particular area. Sometimes they are more akin to toll booths set up by local gangs to extort money from passing civilians. When you move into a new area you can certainly expect to be stopped at these control points. As you develop your work and gain credibility with the group manning the barrier, you might well be allowed to pass unchecked. **Never rely on this, however, and always be prepared to stop if asked to.**

Some check-points are well constructed and established for long-term use: sandbagged bunkers, a tent or rest area for the men, a clearly visible and raisable barrier across the road. They might well have mines placed across the road for added security. In other cases you might simply encounter a tree or even a branch drawn across the road, with one or two men plying their new-found, lucrative trade as toll collectors.

So how do we deal with check-points and road-blocks?

As you approach a check-point, slow down, lower the volume of your radio speaker and make no transmissions. Using your radio could raise suspicion and you can do without it for a few minutes. Tape decks, etc. should also be turned off.

**Obey any signs or instructions to pull in or stop.**

Be polite, friendly and confident. Wind down the window and say hello in the local language. You should not exaggerate or start

"flapping", talking too much, offering cigarettes, etc. This might suggest that you are afraid and could be exploited by the soldiers.

Show your ID card if requested. Explain in a friendly way, if asked, where you are going. Prepare a short summary of your organization's work. If you are new to the area, try a little promotion. But keep it short! Be relaxed if they insist on checking your vehicle. They have the right to do this and you should have nothing to hide.

**Do not be in a rush to continue your journey.** Be prepared to chat with the soldiers. You might also usefully request information on the route ahead or your eventual destination.

Try to imagine yourself in the soldier's position. He is probably extremely bored. You might be one of the few passers-by he has seen all day. You will certainly be of great interest to him. He might never have seen anything quite like you before! We are not talking here of your looks and charm but the fact that you come from a different country and culture. He might just want to chat to you, to try out his few words of your language – or, if you are English, for example, to ask how Manchester United is getting on. It's amazing how many know of this football team. (My apologies to Barcelona or Juventus fans.) So be prepared to spend some time talking to him. It can do nothing but good.

Avoid temptation by ensuring that there are no attractive items such as sweets, chewing gum and cigarettes on your dashboard. If they are in evidence, you should not be surprised if you are asked for one. One will then become many as the other soldiers appear out of nowhere, and for the rest of your day you will be able to contemplate the virtues of being a non-smoker! Temptation might also come in the form of clothing or other items that you are conveying in your vehicle. Here you must be firm and refuse to give anything. Explain that they are for your own use or the use of the victims. Avoid wearing expensive watches and take off your sun glasses. Ray-Bans are much-sought-after prizes!

Ask your field officer or driver to help you with any detailed conversations.

At night, dip your headlights well in advance of the check-point. Nothing annoys a soldier more than being blinded by headlights and

losing his night vision. On arrival, change to side lights. Switch on your inside light so he can easily see who is in the vehicle and that you pose no threat. Ensure that any light mounted on top or at the back of your vehicle to illuminate your flag or logo is turned on. **But you must, as a rule rather than a guideline, always try to avoid driving at night.**

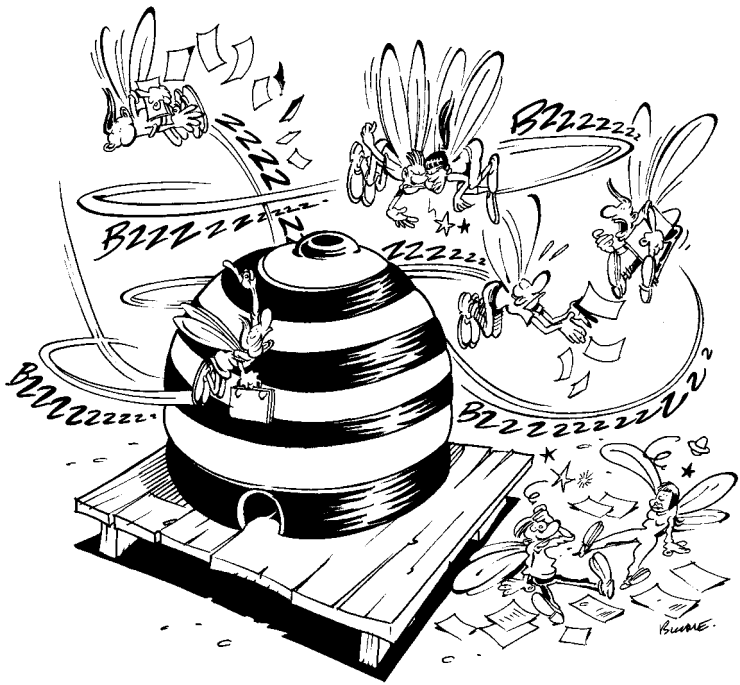
At new or improvised road-blocks run by free agents rather than clearly military personnel, it might be worthwhile stopping well short of the block itself if you possibly can. Just wait for a while and see what is going on. Is other traffic passing through the road-block? How are the occupants of the vehicles being treated as they pass through? Wait for an oncoming vehicle (i.e. one that has passed through the road-block) and ask the occupants' advice on whether it is safe to proceed yourself. Always ask your local staff/drivers for their opinion. In this way you will get a much better idea of whether it is safe to proceed. If not, then at least you are sufficiently out of harm's way to turn back. This technique was used by us in Somalia, where many improvised road-blocks were set up. Normally manned by two or three armed men, their aim was simply to rob passers-by.

## PLANNING, BRIEFING AND DEBRIEFING

We will now look at another important tool of our trade that is often used improperly or not at all. We will look at planning and describe how it can help you.

There is always time to plan a field trip. Planning is really a matter of self-discipline. It is also a matter of professionalism and common sense. If you have not taken the time and made the small effort involved to plan properly, how on earth are you to lead your team safely and properly? How is the rest of your office to know what you are intending to do? How can your ideas be moulded into a coordinated team plan? They cannot. If you do not plan conscientiously, the office very quickly turns into a human beehive. In the morning everyone is very busy "buzzing" around like bees in a hive that has been disturbed.

I am sure that you have seen this happen. We all look frightfully important, we are all in a rush to get out and about. "Don't disturb me, I have to get out by 8 o'clock! See you tonight, goodbye." But we don't really have a clue what the day will bring or how we should




tackle it. Our local staff and drivers look upon this scene of frenzy with faint amusement, wondering where we might lead them next. I have witnessed this "humanitarian" phenomenon on a number of occasions. Sometimes it has led to more than one group ending up in exactly the same place at the same time. What a complete waste of effort! So let's take a look at how to avoid the busy-bee syndrome.

There are several good reasons for planning a mission:

- as a matter of self-discipline, to check that you have considered all aspects of the situation;
- to ensure the success of your mission;
- as a means of ensuring that your team members are fully aware of what is intended;
- to ensure the team's safety;

- as a way of improving coordination with other delegates' missions;
- to inform other offices when plans affect them, and to give them time to notify the people in their own areas.

## How to plan

There are certain features common to any plan. You can refine and develop them to suit your own style and needs. We suggest that you always consider the following.

**The aim.** The aim is the essential starting point. Define your aim as precisely as possible. You should not confuse it by stating two separate aims or a string of secondary aims. This is dangerous, and can lead to a weak or confusing plan, and hence to the failure of your mission. Every one of us has probably been guilty of this at some time in our lives. Our excuse is that we are being "flexible" and responding to immediate needs. The real reason is that we did not plan properly in the first place. If we had, we would have accurately assessed a problem area and taken it into account or made sure that we avoided it. So define your aim and stick to it.

**Dangers involved (the threat).** I strongly recommend that you make the dangers involved the second factor in your plan. Give the matter careful consideration and you may decide at an early stage that it is simply too hazardous to proceed.

**Time and distance.** Next, do a simple calculation of the time you need to accomplish your task. Is there enough time to do everything? If not, scale your plan down now, rather than wasting everyone's time with unnecessary notification and causing yourself embarrassment. (Ask yourself questions such as: "At what time should my party leave? When will we return? Will we make it home by nightfall? Do I need to arrange an overnight stop in a safe area?") If appropriate, remember to adjust your timing to winter conditions.

**Administration and logistics.** Decide how many people you will need in the party. Notify them ahead of time.

Allow for spare fuel, food and water. If it is going to be a long day, you should ensure that your party is prepared.

Prepare the materials needed for the task (leaflets, letters, forms, medical equipment, etc.).

Confirm your requirement for vehicles.

**Coordination.** Here you concentrate on matters that touch directly on your mission.

You must know who to notify and when. Assess the time required to ensure that all parties are duly informed.

Are your colleagues aware of the mission? You might be able to accomplish some important task for them while on your mission. But you should not be pressured into a double aim.

Is the head of office fully informed of all mission details? Has he or she given the green light to proceed?

Are other offices aware of your plan, insofar as it affects them (for example, a cross-line mission into another area)?

**Communications.** Have any of your colleagues been to the same area before? If so, ask them where the best places are to establish radio communications. Should you detour slightly to high ground at point X to ensure contact? Are all your radios checked and working? How will you communicate in an emergency?

## Briefing

You have now made your plan and, having considered every factor, you should be confident that it will succeed. The next important step is to fully brief your team. You must find the time for this. Ideally, you should do it the day before so that everyone has time to prepare – your driver, field officer, other colleagues in your party. They will appreciate this early warning. It will give them confidence in the mission and also in you.

The briefing need not take long: 10 minutes should be enough. You might take this opportunity to delegate tasks to others, such as checking vehicles, radios, fuel and first-aid kits.

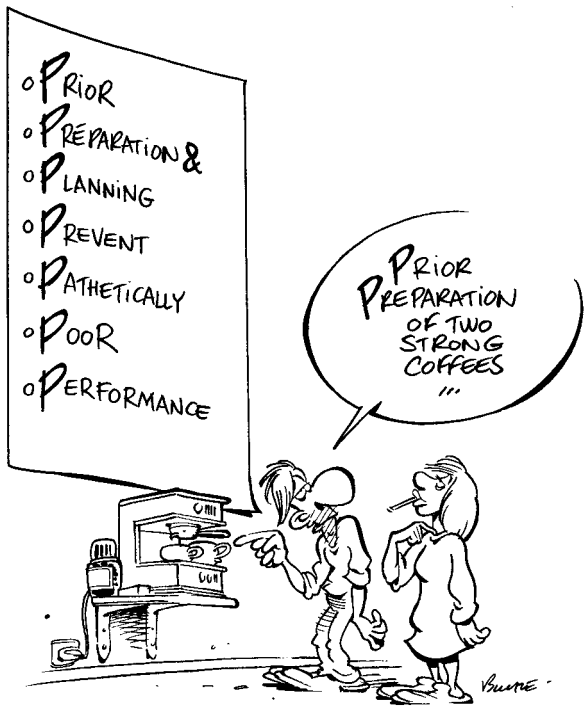
## Debriefing

There remains one important facet of planning to be dealt with. It is the debriefing. At the end of a mission it is always useful to get your group together for a debriefing. The purpose is simply to pick up any suggestions for the future, to say "Well done!" and to point out any

problems so that they are not encountered again. (It should also help you in drawing up your field trip report.)

As with the briefing, 10 minutes will be more than enough. If everyone is tired you may want to do the debriefing first thing the next day.

**The 7 Ps.** Hopefully you can see that planning is a very necessary part of your work, and that it is neither magic nor a difficult science but a very simple and logical tool. Its purpose is to assist you in your important task. Learn to use this tool. In a matter of weeks it will become second nature to you.



If you are feeling lazy or find yourself slipping into the dreaded busy-bee syndrome, just pause in flight for one second and recite the following "7 Ps" to bring you back to earth.

- **P**rior
  - **P**reparation &
    - **P**lanning
      - **P**revent
        - **P**athetically *(you might wish to substitute your own P-word here!)*
          - **P**oor
            - **P**erformance!!!

## SECURITY-INCIDENT REPORTS AND STATISTICS

We humanitarians are not very good at reporting security incidents and even worse at collecting and sharing information on them with others. Our efforts to collect the relevant data are often erratic and uncoordinated. We frequently have no clear idea of what exactly constitutes a security incident and how to classify such events. Nor is there a precise definition of who is a humanitarian worker and who isn't. Often, security incidents and safety-related incidents (car crashes, health- and hygiene-related mishaps, etc.) get mixed up, which leads to further confusion. As a result, important lessons – lessons that could save lives in future – are lost. Without good reporting and a cross-flow of information, it is difficult to build up a clear picture of the threat in any given country. Because of poor incident reporting, we are often forced to work in the dark and therefore take unnecessary risks.

### PROBLEMS DEMANDING ATTENTION

There is a need to define a security incident as clearly as possible if useful statistics are to be produced and new trends become apparent. For example, a near miss can be just as important as an actual incident causing injury or death since the intention of the perpetrator is the same. Very few agencies actually analyse near misses. Indeed, very often the lucky escapees do not even report

the incident for fear of embarrassment or the extra work involved in filling in an incident report. ''It's too much hassle and nothing actually happened to us, so let's just forget about it.''

It is one thing to be accidentally caught in crossfire, say, or have a shell land near an NGO's office. It is a far different thing to be directly targeted or ambushed by an armed group. The former is probably sheer bad luck. The latter is probably perfectly intentional. The consequences of a deliberate attack are obviously far more serious and could prompt an agency to withdraw from a country. There may be important aspects of such an incident that would benefit others if they were made known. Questions such as the following should be asked: ''Was the incident carefully planned? Were we the intended target or were we just in the wrong place at the wrong time?'' The answers make a huge difference. Without a proper report, valuable information about a possible threat to security is invariably lost.

For obvious reasons, incident reports should be shared between colleagues. They should also be shared amongst other agencies in-country. In reality, they hardly ever are. The excuses given for this range from work pressure to insufficient expertise in security analysis to avoiding embarrassment for the organization and on to a desire to preserve confidentiality and not be seen as attempting to gather intelligence. Coming from humanitarians, this lack of concern about the safety of their fellow workers is difficult to understand. It would appear to be simple common sense to share such information in a conflict zone. Even if the motive were simply utilitarian (''If I scratch your back, you might scratch mine!''), one would have thought this sharing would be commonplace. In fact, it hardly ever takes place. Valuable threat or risk information is thus lost and the same mistakes are likely to be repeated time after time.

It is of great importance to analyse incidents. Having each incident analysed by experts will probably give a much better picture of threat or risk than simply adding up the number of incidents in a country. Ignoring obvious threat indicators is unprofessional and should not be tolerated in any organization. Coordinating and ensuring cross-flow of information on security incidents and statistics is an area demanding much improvement in the humanitarian community.

## INCIDENT REPORTING

Incidents may occur in your area and you may be directly involved. This section gives guidance on how to react. Many organizations have their own detailed formats for incident reporting. If this is the case in your organization, you should use them. If not, you might find this section of some use.

There are really two steps involved. The first is the immediate reaction, the second the follow-up report. The basic idea with both is to convey the required information quickly and efficiently to those who need it or might be in a position to offer help.

Again this is a matter of self-discipline: the situation might be tense and it is easy to forget important details. A simple format helps you to report the essential information in such trying situations. It also saves valuable time because you automatically focus on the all-important aspects and there is no need for follow-up queries and questions. This can save lives. Let's now look at both types of report.

### THE IMMEDIATE REPORT

You should try to immediately inform your delegation and any other colleagues in radio contact.

Keep to the essentials:

- Who was involved?
- When did the incident happen?
- Where did it happen?
- What happened (describe type of incident, any injuries, etc.)?
- Future intentions: what do you now intend doing and do you require assistance?

Thus, in a very short and sharp format you have given all the immediate information you can. Others can now react and you can get on with handling the problem without interminable follow-up radio chatter that simply wastes time.

### FOLLOW-UP REPORTS

You might well be requested later to write a more detailed report. If no format exists, try the following. Its aim again is to focus on the main points, to give the correct information to those who need it and to spare you time-consuming clarification.

Suggested format:

- Date and time (of incident).
- Location.
- Type of mission (relief, medical, etc.).
- Personnel involved from delegation (full name and post held by each, including local staff).
- Others involved (military, UN, other armed groups, etc.).
- Injuries to members of your team.
- Vehicle damage.
- Other damage or losses.
- Description of incident (short summary of what happened, a sketch map or diagram).
- Follow-up or ongoing action related to the incident.
- Lessons learnt.
- Comments of head of delegation/office.

The last two points rarely appear in any incident report. This is a pity because valuable lessons that can be shared with others in the organization or with other organizations are lost as a result.

As already pointed out, the lessons drawn at headquarters combined with the comments of head of delegation/office might well benefit others. It is very important for us all to learn the results of investigations into major incidents so that mistakes are not repeated. Often, however, these investigations and their outcome are shrouded in secrecy, which is not necessarily helpful.

*CHAPTER 7*

# PASSIVE-PROTECTION IDEAS FOR YOUR SAFETY AND SECURITY

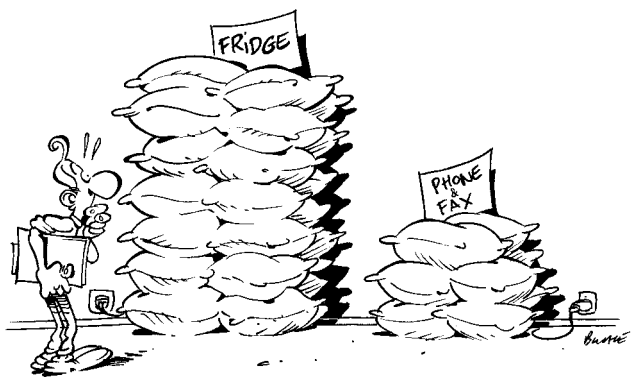
We will now look at additional ways in which you can improve your safety. These are often termed passive-protection measures or, if you prefer, preventive measures.

We will study ways of protecting your buildings and their occupants with shelters and blast walls, the criteria you might use in choosing your buildings, and commonly used passive-protection equipment (helmets, flak jackets, etc.) We will end the section with some practical hints on vehicles and driving, plus a couple of words on personal possessions.

## PROTECTING YOURSELF AND YOUR BUILDINGS

The aim here is to suggest ways to furnish simple protection in your offices and houses against the effects of artillery, mortars, sniper fire and explosive devices generally.

I will attempt throughout to be pragmatic. In some countries it may be extremely difficult to obtain the necessary materials to build shelters. So I will propose alternatives, for example, to sandbags and even to sand itself. Through ingenuity and common sense you can improve on protection even when the "correct" materials are not available.



No shelter that we can build will guarantee protection against a direct hit from a heavy weapon such as an artillery shell. Recent conflicts have demonstrated that even the hardest, purpose-built shelters can be destroyed with precision weapons. However, they do afford excellent protection against smaller weapons such as rifles and grenades and against large nearby explosions and the effects of blast.

## Materials and tools

The tools and materials mentioned below might not be required immediately. However, it would be sensible to ensure that you have at least some essential passive-protection supplies pre-positioned in case the situation deteriorates rapidly and supplies cannot get through.

**Sandbags.** The basic requirement is the sandbag. The sandbag can vary tremendously both in size and the type of material used to make it. The old-fashioned jute bag is in my opinion still the best. It has been made for the job and normally has been impregnated with a preservative to make it last by withstanding bacteria, fungi and the extremes of climate. As to size, small is better than big: 60 cm long and 30 cm wide is ideal. You might be tempted to opt for large sacks as they would seem to make the job easier. But these are much more difficult to lay properly and, as pointed out below, do not really allow you to construct a good strong wall or shelter. If jute is not available, alternatives are plastic and polythene. These are usable but generally are not as good as jute. They rot quickly when exposed to sunlight and also tend to split open.

**Wood.** Wooden planks and even small tree trunks are extremely valuable in building shelters. They can be used to strengthen roofs. If placed across windows, planks provide excellent (if not overly pretty) protection against the effects of blast, and help obscure the sniper's vision.

**Shovels.** Two or three sturdy shovels will be required by your working party.

**String.** I mention this seemingly minor item with profound conviction, having had to build many shelters in the former Yugoslavia without it! The string is required to tie the necks or "chokes" of the sandbags. As you can imagine, doing without it is a

real problem. Some purpose-made sandbags come with the necessary string attached.

**Sandbag alternatives.** Sandbags will not always be available. Even if they can be ordered, you may need some interim solution. Here your initiative and ingenuity will be required.

Receptacles such as boxes, baskets, sacks and oil drums can be filled with earth or rubble and used instead of sandbags as an energy-absorbing medium.

Strips of sod or turf cut from grassland can also be used in much the same way as sandbags. The strips should be laid grass-to-grass and soil-to-soil, except for the top layer which should be laid with the grass uppermost. Split timber pickets may be driven vertically through the sod strips at intervals to hold them in position and to strengthen the wall.

Apart from these simple items, all you then need is an enthusiastic working party to complete the task.

**How to fill sandbags.** Strange as it may sound, people quite enjoy the novel task of filling sandbags – at least at the beginning! Your aim here should be to organize an efficient system for the workers, or indeed your colleagues if local manpower is not available.

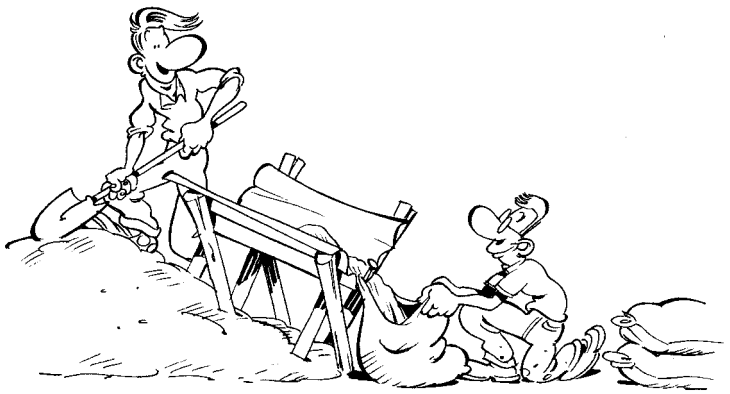
I suggest:

- one person actually filling sandbags;
- two holding and tying the bags as they are filled;
- two laying the sandbags;
- a carrying party as required (depending on the distance from the place where they are filled to where they are laid).

A party of five plus the carrying party can, when employed in this way, lay 60 sandbags in one hour, which should equal 2 $m^2$ of sandbag-wall protection.

A simple device can help. A nail should be driven into the lower end of a tilted sheet of corrugated iron. The sandbag may hang on the nail while sand is running into the bag.

In this way, two people can quite easily fill about 60 sandbags in one hour.



## Basic sandbag construction

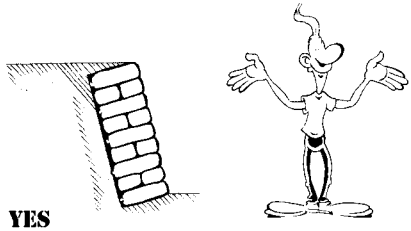
Whether you are building a simple wall or an entire shelter, there are some basic rules that you must follow.

These rules will ensure that the construction is strong and that it will indeed protect you. Taking short-cuts or simply ignoring these rules may appear attractive, but if you proceed without them you are wasting your time and putting lives at risk.

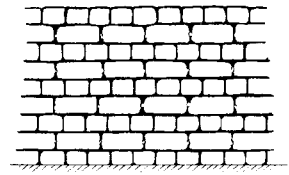
Basic rules:

- Do not overfill the sandbags. Fill them to three-quarters full and tie the necks.
- Lay the sandbags in horizontal layers, the way a mason lays bricks (so that they overlap in each successive layer to achieve much greater strength). The first layer consists of sandbags laid head-on called "headers". In the second layer, the sandbags are laid lengthways along the wall and are called "stretchers". Thus you continue, with layers composed alternately of headers and stretchers.
- Stagger the joints in adjacent layers. A wall so constructed is said to be "correctly bonded".
- To prevent them from bursting, lay the sandbags so that neither the necks nor the seams are on the outer face of the wall.
- Tuck in the unfilled end of each bag as you lay it.

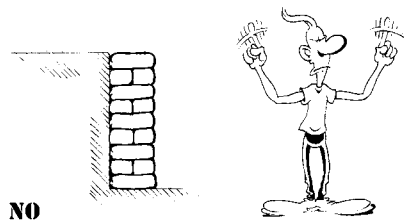
## HOW TO LAY SANDBAGS TO BUILD BLAST WALLS AND SHELTERS



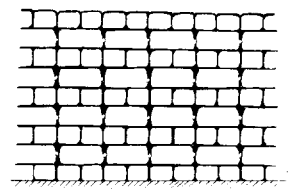
**YES**
(bags set at right angles to slope)



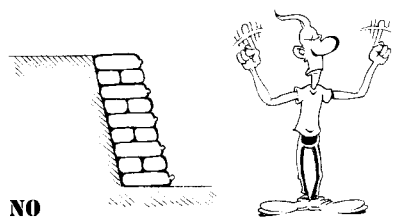
**YES**
(joints broken, seams and necks not showing)



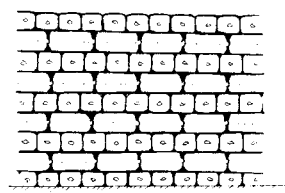
**NO**
(wall vertical)



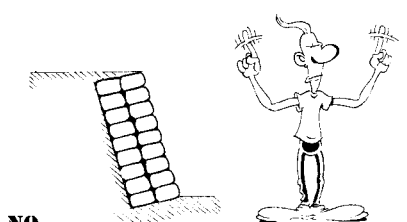
**NO**
(joints not broken)



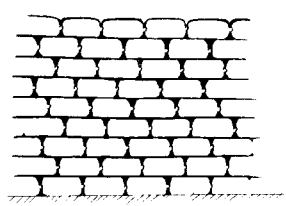
**NO**
(bags not set at right angles to slope)



**NO**
(seams and necks showing)



**NO**

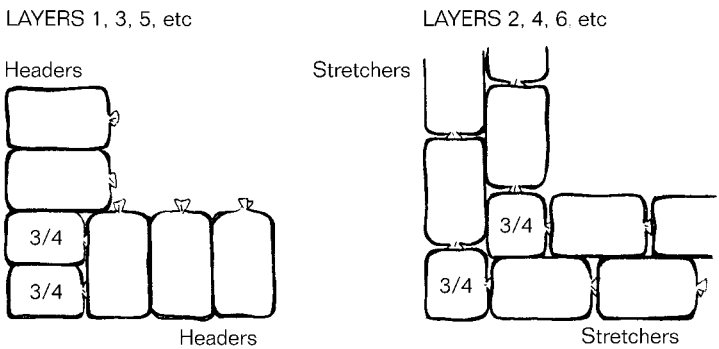


**NO**
(all stretchers and no headers)

- Most important: shape each bag as it is laid in such a way as to make absolutely certain that it is compact. This is done by beating it with a board or shovel.
- Regardless of whether you are making a wall or shelter, it will last much longer if cement is used at some stage. Cement can be mixed with the material used to fill the bags in ratios of 1 part to 10 parts of dry earth, or 1 part to 6 parts of a sand-gravel mix. The mixture sets as the bag absorbs moisture. Alternatively, filled bags may be dipped in a cement-water slurry.

**Corners.** Building the corners (if necessary on a wall, but more likely on a shelter) is particularly important. If they are not constructed properly, the whole shelter will be weakened. The rules are really very simple and are illustrated in the diagrams.

**BUILDING CORNERS ON BLAST WALLS AND SHELTERS**




Bag sizes:
Full bag = 0.6 x 0.3 x 0.1m
3/4 bag = 0.4 x 0.3 x 0.1m

## BLAST WALLS, SHELTERS AND OTHER IDEAS

Building blast walls and shelters and creating additional protection for yourself may appear unnecessary, time-consuming and not in keeping with the ideals and ethos of your organization. However, in

certain parts of the world in which we now live and work, it is a sad fact that such measures are necessary. Artillery and mortar fire on a town or city can be indiscriminate, as we have seen. Even if you are not the actual target, the threat will still exist. If you live and work in such areas, it is your duty to protect yourself and your staff as effectively as you can. I will now offer some guidelines on how to achieve this.

## Blast walls

Blast walls are required when there is the threat of artillery, mortar or even sniper fire. Built correctly, they provide you with protection against the effects of shell blast. They will also stop a sniper's bullet.

Examples of where you might use these walls:

- at the entrances to delegation buildings, either inside or out;
- to provide safe cover on the way to a shelter (it is pretty pointless having a marvellous shelter if you remain exposed while heading for it);
- against windows (normally, this type of wall needs to be further supported by planks of wood to hold the bags firmly in place);
- at the entrances to shelters;
- to provide protection for fuel, generators, the radio room or even vital and fragile medical stores;
- to protect your guards working outside;
- warehouses and hospital wards (you can create sandbagged "bays" in warehouses or even hospital wards, the purpose being to limit the effect of any explosion to one area, thereby sparing the rest).

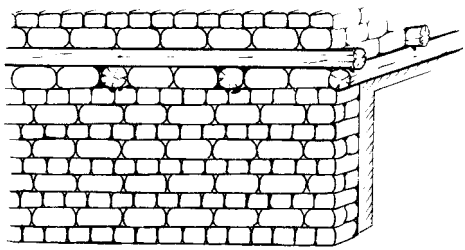
**Construction.** To build a blast wall, simply follow the diagrams. Regarding the proper height, I suggest that you always try to build them to just above head height. This will protect people standing or working in the office from unexpected blasts. The same applies to blocking windows. When it comes to building walls to protect your route to the shelter, you can afford to make them a lot lower and thus save time. It is no problem running to a shelter in a crouched position or even crawling!

## Shelters

If you are setting up an office or looking for staff accommodation in an area where there is a security threat, the best advice is to find a building with a cellar or some other underground facility such as a garage. These are by far the best shelters. Access will be simple from your work area or bedroom. You may need to improve the facility with blast walls on the windows or a low wall to get safely to it. If you do not have such a facility, there is no alternative to actually building a shelter.

You might well have to strengthen the roof of a cellar or other room. This can be done with strong wooden beams or logs as shown. In addition, exposed walls must be protected with sandbags.

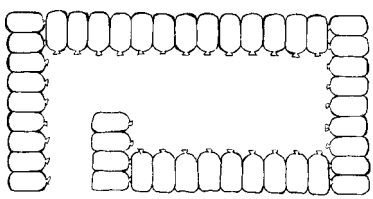
### Building Sandbagged Shelters and Blast Walls



Two layers of sandbags across roof

Wooden planks across roof to support sandbags

Spaces left in top wall layer for logs to form roof support



Angled blast wall

**Sandbagged shelters.** When building shelters, the best advice is to think carefully about where to put them, otherwise you waste time and energy. Use your initiative and if a partial shelter already exists, simply improve it. Other important points to consider before you start building are as follows.

The shelter must be readily accessible. It is pointless if you have to run 100 metres to your shelter in the middle of the night.

Construct the shelter in the building or house, if space permits. If not, then build it adjacent to an outside door.

Always try to have *two entry points* in case one becomes blocked.

Avoid the temptation to build a palace. Small is beautiful when it comes to shelters. Large shelters are a waste of time. What's more, the bigger you make them, the weaker they become. Consider how many people need to use the shelter, then make it just big enough for all to squeeze in, with just a little additional room, or make a number of smaller shelters.

If you are using local staff to build the shelter, make sure you brief them carefully first. If you do not, you may have a big surprise when you return later! I suggest you take time to mark out on the ground the size you want and even draw a diagram for them.

**Construction.** The diagrams show the essential details of building a shelter. By all means build a shelter against a wall if this is possible. It will save time. If you do not consider the wall strong enough, strengthen it with a layer of sandbags. The important points about shelters are as follows.

In construction, aim to be not too large and not too high.

Place wood across the roof to give it strength. Metal sheets or metal poles will do just as well.

It is advisable to place two layers of sandbags on the roof.

Ensure that the entry point is protected by creating an angled blast wall.

**Items to be included in the shelters.** Once you have built or found a suitable shelter, it is worth considering the following items to be placed inside or built into them.

For large office shelters:

- spare coaxial cables linked to the shelter to enable you to continue using your radios;
- spare antennas stored in the shelter (your main ones may be destroyed);

- emergency power (either a cable link to your generator or a small auxiliary generator installed in the shelter);
- an emergency string of lights to link to your generator;
- heaters;
- bedding, food, water, candles, torches, chemical toilet;
- picks and shovels (you may have to dig your way out!);
- spare fuel;
- medical kit;
- fire extinguishers;
- chairs, benches;
- the keys to the shelter (does everyone know where they are?).

Having created your shelter, do not start using it as a storeroom and gradually fill it up, or block the entry route with stored items. You might need it quickly and unexpectedly.

For small shelters:

- torch or candles;
- food and a bottle of water;
- sleeping bag;
- a portable radio (if you have been issued with one, don't forget to take it with you);
- chairs or a bench.

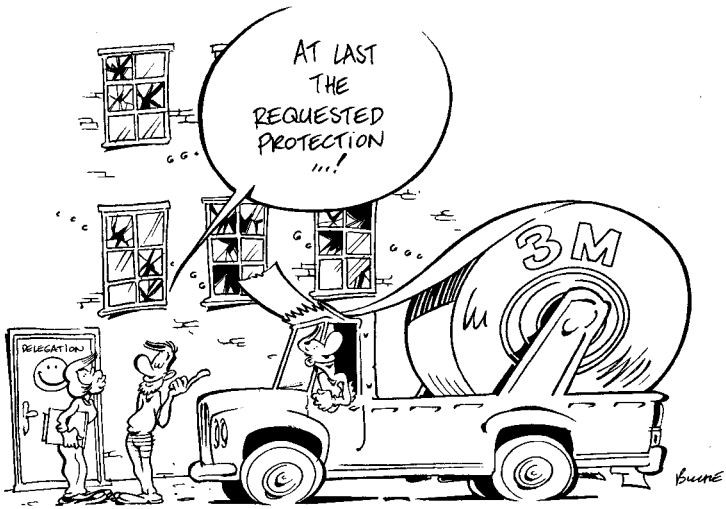
### Other ideas for passive protection

There are many other innovative ways of providing protection. A few practical ideas are listed here.

**Tape.** Rolls of transparent polythene sticky tape, sometimes referred to as "3M paper", can be very helpful. This tape is used to provide additional protection against blast. The sticky polythene is placed on glass windows and doors, completely covering them. Being clear, it hardly affects vision through the glass. In the event of an explosion, instead of the whole window shattering and causing injury to people and damage to valuable equipment, all that occurs is a small hole. It is ideal for the windows of your houses as well as your office. Despite the obvious benefits of this form of passive protection, it sometimes meets with the most violent objections, especially from the ladies: "But you will spoil the view! It looks awful!" I understand the aesthetic point of the argument, but surely it is better to spoil a pretty view than a pretty face. Shattering glass

can kill or maim. Many lives have been saved already by this simple measure, so please use it. A further tip, to avoid the frequent formation of bubbles as you put on the polythene, is to first wet the glass with a weak soapy solution. In this way you can move the "paper" around on the glass to get it in exactly the right position and smooth out any bubbles or creases with a cloth. 3M-type material will not stick to frosted glass.

**Using 3M paper can save your life. It is strongly recommended for use in all your premises.**



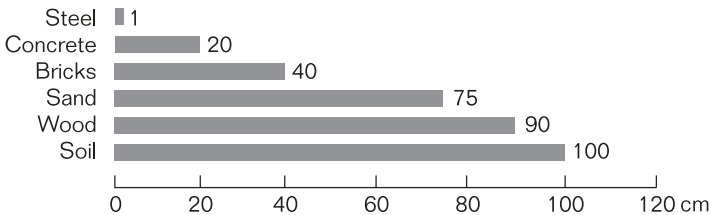

If these transparent rolls are not available or you are waiting for it to arrive, the second-best course of action is to use ordinary cellotape ("scotch tape") or sticky paper. Criss-cross the window with the tape. This is not as effective as 3M: it only partially reduces the shattering effect. The glass not covered by tape will still shatter into hefty and dangerous pieces.

**Net curtains.** Heavy net curtains are a great help against blast. They have the effect of soaking up the shock and blast effects. If you have them, then ensure that they are closed at times of high risk. In fact, *any* curtains — the heavier the material, the better — reduce blast effect.

**Shutters.** Many houses throughout the world have wooden window shutters. These can be a great help in reducing the effects of blast. If you have them, ensure that they are closed during periods of high risk.

**Wooden planks.** When nailed to or simply laid against windows, these provide simple and excellent protection against the effects of blast. (But they will not stop shrapnel — that is, bomb, mine, shell or grenade fragments — or a sniper's bullet.)

**Protection thicknesses.** Indicated here are general protection thicknesses (in centimetres) against small arms firing and blast fragments.




Note that these thicknesses are good only against sporadic fire. Protection against continuous firing would require double the thicknesses indicated.

**Air-raid shelters.** We will not dwell on the subject of air-raid shelters for the simple reason that they are firmly in the realm of construction experts. They should ideally be dug underground and constructed of reinforced concrete. If the threat of air raids exists or is likely to exist, hire a construction engineer to do the work.

Passive protection in the form of shelters and blast walls is now unfortunately a requirement on many of our missions. I trust that this section has helped to explain how you can better protect yourself, your team, your buildings and your houses.

Now that you have gone to the trouble of installing your protection, there is some final advice. Please remember to arrange a practice drill so that everyone knows where the shelters are. And don't

forget new arrivals: ensure that they know where to go in an emergency.

Happy building! I hope you never have to use your shelters. But better safe than sorry!

## BUILDING SELECTION

If you are moving into a new area, it might well be your responsibility to select suitable buildings for your office, houses, warehouse, etc. The temptation might well be to choose something pretty, with a good view, in the centre of town for easy access to markets, etc. Fine, no one is saying you must live like hermits. But just consider why you are there. It is a conflict zone.

The battle might be miles away today but it could come to your doorstep tomorrow. Many office sites have turned out badly; they were poor choices in the first place, based on false criteria. I have visited locations that have been severely battered by the surrounding conflict. The buildings originally chosen had excellent views, but little attention had been paid to safety and protection. The staff had therefore suffered unduly when the battle suddenly came closer. One outstanding example was an office chosen to overlook the sea. A similar building just behind it, with no view but a purpose-built nuclear shelter, was rejected as ''not as nice"! When a battle began to rage in that particular town, the other building was no longer available. The staff survived, but would they not have been more secure in the less aesthetically pleasing building?

So let's look at a few guidelines for building selection. Not all things recommended will be available or possible. But try to match as many as you can.

You should consider:

- the threat to the town or village;
- the condition of the building, required repairs, etc.;
- where you could take shelter;
- radio reception and possibilities for fax, phone and other modes of communication;
- difficulties in gaining access for your staff and members of the local population wishing to visit you;
- evacuation possibilities;

- the degree to which the site is already sheltered, such as in a valley and not on top of a hill, etc. (Does it have a perimeter wall? Is it secure?);
- fire hazards;
- access to water and electricity;
- proximity of military installations and similar sites (to be avoided as they could become targets);
- similar vulnerable points or likely military objectives: power stations, water works, government buildings, police stations, chemical works, etc.;
- the availability of secure parking;
- whether there is a threat from suicide car-bombers (Is the building vulnerable from adjoining roads? Can separation from roads or the car-park be achieved with barriers?);
- where best to set up your reception point (This should be outside the main building in a place where visitors can be carefully checked, ideally with the aid of a metal detector. Steps should be taken to ensure that women visitors are searched by female staff.).

The choice might be yours alone. In many cases, however, it will be a decision taken by the head of office in conjunction with the administrator and, ideally, a construction specialist.

## PERSONAL PASSIVE-PROTECTION EQUIPMENT

Personal passive-protection equipment means gear that you might be issued with by your organization for your protection, such as flak jackets, helmets and armoured vehicles.

The following points should be made at the outset.

**Do not allow any of this equipment to give you a false sense of security.** It should be regarded as *enhancing* security, not guaranteeing it.

Not all organizations use such equipment. This is not because they are indifferent to the well-being or safety of their staff. It is simply because it is not always required. Having to resort to such sophisticated and radical means of protection indicates a very serious security environment, one that you should probably not be working in anyway. Rather than issue such equipment, your

organization might well simply order you to withdraw, or certainly to limit your activities on certain days or in certain areas.

None of the equipment mentioned below will make you immune to the full range of threats you might face. Possessing an armoured vehicle does not mean you have a "tank" that can drive through any danger. Your equipment might well have been issued as a precaution for the unexpected, as a form of contingency planning for a serious deterioration in the situation. It remains your responsibility always to carefully assess the threat to a particular mission or field trip. Having done this, you are then in a position to decide what particular items of such equipment you should take with you and use. Personally, I have strong reservations regarding such equipment except as a sensible precaution, that is the "might happen" situation rather than the "will happen" one. Soldiers use it, but they are required to operate on the front line in battle. Humanitarian workers are not soldiers. If they are operating in such high-threat areas, they have crossed that dividing line between calculated risk and the unacceptable.

In other words, you should have the equipment with you. And if the situations warrants it, use it.

The level of protection offered by the different types of equipment varies considerably. Basically, you pay your money and you make your choice. If an organization buys such equipment, it should make clear to its people in layman's terms just how much it is designed to protect. The equipment purchasers in your organization also have a responsibility to know just what it is they are buying and just what it is they want to use it for. The market is becoming increasingly complex, as I discovered when given the task of procuring a large supply of ballistic (bullet-proof) jackets. Each year new designs and new materials come onto the market. Then there is the cost: these items do not come cheaply. You must know your subject or find an independent expert who does. We will attempt here to indicate in general terms what level of protection each item can achieve.

## The flak jacket

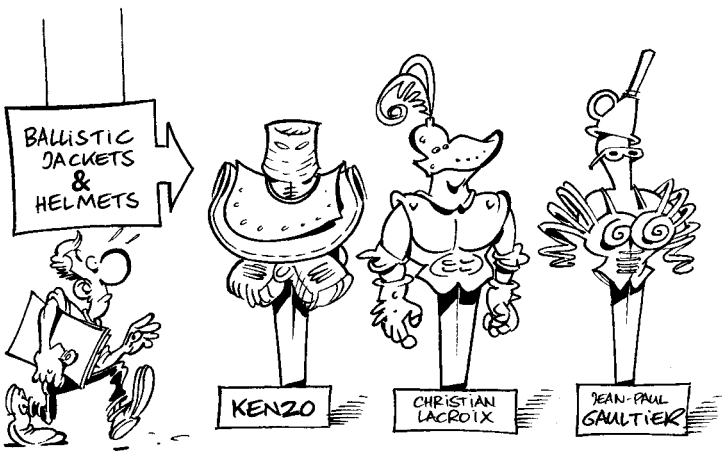
We have seen the flak jacket used in a number of operations, particularly in the former Yugoslavia. It provides a low level of protection for the chest, back and neck, being designed to protect

these parts of the body against the effects of blast, shrapnel and splinters of glass, wood, etc. It is not designed to stop a bullet.

It is comfortable and light to wear and should be used in conjunction with a helmet.

## The ballistic jacket

Ballistic (bullet-proof) jackets offer varying levels of protection. The best can give protection against all known rifle and pistol rounds up to 7.62 mm. They are expensive. They too are designed only to protect certain parts of the body. Additional neck and groin protection options are available. The resistance offered by the basic jacket, which in itself can provide blast protection, is enhanced by ballistic plates front and back, and by side plates. They can come with a large front pocket for your ID cards and first-aid pressure bandages. With the high level of protection comes weight: some 12 kg. At first you will find them very difficult to wear but you will soon become accustomed to them. Some can be bought with so-called "trauma" plates. These give further protection against the effects of shock from a bullet strike and reduce bruising to the body. There are men's and ladies' versions. Make sure that you order the correct type, or the ladies might feel they are wearing a rather ancient type of corset!



When and how to wear the ballistic jacket:

- The ballistic jacket is used only to reduce the risks to delegates, local staff and convoy drivers working in areas of high risk: snipers, operations close to front lines, cross-line missions, etc.
- The back and front collar options, which can be opened and closed, give added protection to your neck and throat.
- Always wear the jacket with a helmet for head protection.
- Always check to make sure that the ballistic plates are in place. They can be easily removed. One plate is normally curved and should be placed in the front compartment of the jacket. The jacket and indeed all these safety items are very expensive. You will need to take care of them as best you can. They are extremely attractive items for thieves and soldiers, who can sell or use them to their own advantage.

### The helmet

Helmets are designed to protect the most vulnerable part of the body against blast and shrapnel. They are not normally designed to stop a direct hit from a bullet.

When and how to wear the helmet:

- The helmet is worn in high-risk areas where flak and ballistic jackets are used.
- Always ensure that the neck strap is securely fastened. A jolt will otherwise send the helmet flying off your head just when you need it most.
- The helmet takes time to put on and fasten, so don't wait until it is too late.
- Open the windows of your vehicle a little when wearing the helmet. It restricts your hearing and, with the windows shut as well, you might not hear the warning sounds of danger.
- The helmet provides excellent protection against unexpected jolts or accidents in vehicles. Sudden swerves or stops might send you or your passengers flying inside a vehicle, causing head injuries if they are not protected.

### Armoured vehicles

Armoured vehicles are usually of the 4 × 4 (four-wheel-drive) type. All vehicles (for example, the cabin of a convoy truck) can be protected with armour if required. Here again there are many

different levels of protection available. The higher the degree of protection, the greater (normally) the weight of your vehicle. The added weight resulting from these higher levels of protection might even require special driving skills because of the handling peculiarities this creates. Practise driving the armoured vehicle or get a specialist driver for it. It takes time to get used to it.

The armour plating can provide good protection against rifle fire, blast from shells, anti-personnel mines and, to a more limited degree, the blast effect of other mines. Again, just because you have such a vehicle available, **do not treat it as your personal go-anywhere tank**. It can and will protect you against the less powerful threats, but you should not expect it to protect you against everything. In other words, be sensible. If the risks are high, turn back. An armoured vehicle is not normally designed to withstand the larger sniper bullets or a direct hit from an artillery round or mortar round. Do ask what level of protection your vehicle gives you. Procurers know what you want and, more importantly, they know what you are getting.

Armoured vehicles should be used for vital missions in high-risk areas and when entering an unknown but possibly high-risk area for the first time. They should normally be used in vehicle pairs for added security, especially in the event of a breakdown. If conditions warrant the use of armoured vehicles, they also require that you wear your helmet and flak or ballistic jacket for added protection.

Likewise, if the situation calls for the use of protective equipment, you should also ensure that a first-aid kit is always carried in your vehicle and seek training in its use. Always carry two compression bandages with you. They are small, simple, easy-to-carry purpose-built pads which can be quickly applied to wounds to stop bleeding and thus save lives. Ask your medical department or field nurse for them (you can also make them yourself).

## Other forms of vehicle protection

Ballistic-protective blankets, or ''mine blankets'', are designed as an economical way of providing some minimal protection in vehicles not equipped with the armour described above. These blankets – made from the same type of material used for ballistic jackets – are laid on the floor of the vehicle. They are quite heavy (almost six kilos

per square metre). The blankets augment the protection offered by the vehicle's floor against small fragments projected by grenades, unexploded ordnance or anti-personnel mines. However, you should not let these new passive-protection aids give you a false sense of security. They will not protect you or your vehicle against anti-tank mines.

Sandbags can be laid on the floor of vehicles to provide added protection against the mine threat. They are effective against blast and fragments from anti-personnel mines but should only be expected to *reduce* the blast effect of anti-tank mines. In other words, don't expect full protection. Sandbags naturally bring with them the penalty of added weight and decreased vehicle stability.

Passive-protection equipment will enhance your safety. At the end of the day, however, your best protection is your own common sense and judgement. **If the threat is acute, do not rely on this equipment to guarantee your safety. It could give you a false sense of security.** It is far better to show moral courage and turn back from a situation than to risk your life and those of your local staff. Tomorrow is another day. Then you can reassess the risk and, if it is reasonable, proceed.

## VEHICLES AND DRIVING

In this chapter on passive-protection ideas for your safety and security, you may find it strange to encounter the topic of vehicles and driving. Well, the sad fact is that there are far too many road accidents during field missions. These accidents can certainly be reduced through the sensible application of some basic guidelines.

It is once again very much a matter of adjustment. Roads may well exist, but in name only! They can be in a sorry state, cratered and full of potholes from shelling. Forget road signs, for they have long gone. So take a map. And forget other traffic. You will normally be the only road user, with the exception perhaps of the odd military vehicle. There are few passers-by to render assistance if you break down or run out of fuel. You are no longer driving your GTi at your normal high speed down a very familiar route. You will be driving a strange, large vehicle that demands different skills, and driving it down "roads" that may be completely new to you. So what are the guidelines?

## Four-wheel drive

The vehicles that I have seen used by humanitarian volunteers have for the most part been excellent: large $4 \times 4$ models, specially manufactured for reliability and for coping with rough terrain. But for most of us they are different from the vehicles to which we are accustomed. They are essentially high and heavy.

As good as these vehicles are, please remember that they do require some understanding and practice in driving. In your initial training (if you were lucky) you might have been able to practise on one of these vehicles, but it would have been a very brief practice indeed. You should not be self-conscious or act over-confident when you arrive in your field location. If you are unsure about driving such vehicles (as most of us are when new), ask questions and practise in the area around your office before venturing into the field.

It is surprising how often you need four-wheel-drive capability. Do you know how to obtain it? "Yes, of course: you merely press the four-wheel-drive button on the dashboard and off you go." Wrong! OK, you do press the button. Then you place the gear lever in the correct slot. This may be true on some vehicles but not all. On some you have to do all this and then get out and switch a knob on each tyre hub to the four-wheel mode. I was once caught out on this in a very tricky situation. I had not bothered to find out how the four-wheel system worked in a certain vehicle and certainly nobody told me. I thought they were just like military vehicles, so no problem – a stupid mistake. Find out how your system works; practise it, and ensure that all your team members know it as well.

Remember, your vehicle's tyres are subjected to very rough treatment. You do not always drive the same vehicle. You are not always aware of how much life remains in each tyre. It could be worn and on the verge of a blow-out, which could be fatal at high speed.

Of course you know how to get a tyre changed. You take it to your local garage and it is done for you instantly; or you call the motorway emergency service and they are there in minutes. I won't belabour the point. Find out how to change your vehicle's tyres. Practise it with your team just so that you all know what to do and how to do it. You might well need to change a tyre quickly; practice will help. Do not rely on the tyre-changing tools to be where they should be. It is almost a natural law governing humanitarian vehicles

that the tools disappear! Check the tools before every field trip. Check the vehicle's jack and practise using it. I once saw a whole fleet of vehicles that had the wrong type of jack. They were too short and would not reach the axle even when fully extended. The only way of operating them was in conjunction with a thick wooden block placed underneath them to give the required height. Obviously it was a good idea to find a suitable piece of wood and always take it with you.

If you might need snow chains, find out how to put them on. It is not as easy as you may think.

As with the vehicle jacks, always check to make sure that your tool box is complete. Is everything there? Is it unlocked or do you have the key? Once I visited an office that had excellent tool boxes in each vehicle. But I can vouch only for the boxes since each was locked, and not one person knew where the keys were! It was excellent security, but counter-productive.

Without wishing to sound like someone with a Rambo complex, I nevertheless suggest that you practise some of the vehicle drills that you might hope to master, and do so *before* an incident occurs. For example, practise with your team a quick reaction to a rifle or artillery threat, taking cover, etc. Set the scene on a field trip in a nice, calm area. Then practise it. You might all repeat the drill from time to time. It is just an idea. I would certainly do it, but it's entirely up to you.

So much for vehicle guidelines. Now let us look at a short vehicle check-list that you or your driver might find useful.

Vehicle check-list:

- tyres (what condition are they in and do they have sufficient air pressure?);
- oil, coolant, fuel;
- tools (all in place, including the wheel jack?);
- spare fan belt, extra fuel in cans if required, spare tyre (properly inflated?);
- passive-protection kit if required (helmet, flak jacket);
- drinking water;
- spare/emergency food;
- first-aid kit;
- sleeping bag or blankets (always worth taking in cold climates or for first aid);

- flashlight;
- map;
- vehicle logo/flag (if your organization has one);
- lights (including lights to illuminate your logo/flag);
- documents required by local authorities, for example, log, registration and insurance papers.

## Driving

Tall vehicles are inherently unstable at high speed. They are not sports cars designed to "hug" the ground when cornering. Always drive at safe speeds and within your capabilities – and those of your vehicle. I have been far more frightened by the driving of colleagues than by any of the other dangers referred to in this book. The highest speed that I would recommend in a 4 x 4 vehicle on an excellent road is 80 km per hour. Anything higher brings an adrenalin buzz that you do not need.

On one occasion I rode with a colleague who reached 120 km per hour! And we were in fairly hostile territory. To his amazement, I asked him to stop and let me walk home, which I considered slightly less risky than continuing at such a ridiculous speed. "But we have a meeting at the office in 15 minutes! We'll be late," he explained. I

replied, "If you drive like this, the only meeting that you are heading for is one with your maker." He slowed down, and we still made the meeting! Such hurry is just not worth it. Drive within your limits and those of the vehicle.

**Do not drive at night if you can possibly avoid it.** The condition of the roads is unknown and the enhanced opportunity for others to stop you and do you harm is simply too great. If you have no choice but to drive at night, draw attention to yourself by lighting up your organization's flag or logo.

In high-risk areas, always consider carefully the possibility of driving in pairs of vehicles. A lone vehicle is a very tempting target for the unscrupulous. Two vehicles give added security. If one breaks down or is damaged, you can all get safely home in the other. It is not always easy to adhere to this policy since it naturally uses up valuable transport. With good planning and selection of tasks, however, it can be achieved.

## PERSONAL EFFECTS

We will not dwell too long on personal effects. But there are several suggestions that might enhance your personal security.

Earlier I mentioned dress, suggesting dressing down so as not to attract unwarranted attention or to annoy, or indeed to tempt thieves. By "dressing down" I don't mean a pair of split or frayed jeans and a loud or suggestive T-shirt. I do mean cotton slacks, some pleasantly neat-looking shirts, dresses, etc. You have to set a sensible standard, but you do not need to go to extremes. You might well need a suit or sports jacket and tie, and ladies may need a more elegant dress for meetings with officials.

Also, be very careful about buying military-looking items, such as army-type boots, an olive-drab fatigue jacket and so on. They are attractive to those you might meet. They could also raise unnecessary suspicion. You should not buy ex-military equipment for yourself either. I met one chap who had invested heavily in his own flak jacket because he thought it was better than that bought by the organization. Again, this could single you out for special attention or simply prompt suspicion. By the way, such clothes won't go down well with your colleagues; you simply appear odd!

You need a cheap plastic watch. A "genuine imitation", on sale everywhere, is also good enough. A Rolex or Cartier is better left at home unless you have good insurance. It is just too tempting at a check-point or similar close encounter.

A Swiss army knife or – the newest craze – a "Leatherman super tool" (same idea: all in one) are excellent items to take with you. I have had three removed by friendly souvenir hunters but they are not too expensive to replace. Avoid military-looking knives.

Good shoes, strong trainers or light walking boots (of which there are many now on the market) are almost essential for day-to-day work. For meetings you will need something a little more formal.

Water-proof clothing is necessary almost throughout the world. You might be going to the tropics but you should not forget the monsoon. The "Barbour" type of oiled jacket looks good and is water-proof.

You will need some items of personal equipment for rest and relaxation, such as a Walkman CD player or a short-wave radio, DVD, MP3 player, etc. The choice of these items is naturally entirely up to you. They are relatively cheap, so even if they disappear – and many do – it's no problem.

Your laptop and your mobile phone are key tools for your work. It is always useful to include a set of universal adaptors for your electrical and phone/e-mail connections. A surge protector or a plug incorporating this function is useful in countries where the power supply is erratic as it could prevent damage to your equipment.

A good-quality flashlight/torch (preferably with a rechargeable battery) can prove invaluable.

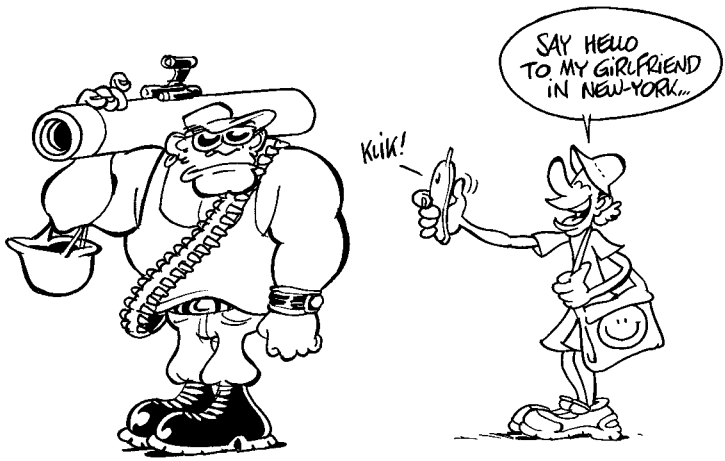
Carry cash with you but in no great quantity. Thus, if you are relieved of it, you have not lost too much. If you tell a "mugger" that you have nothing, you will probably not be believed, and then you risk being subjected at the very least to a search.

Most organizations have insurance policies for personal possessions. Of course, it is your duty to inform the insurance authorities promptly of any losses. It is also useful to get some form of corroboration from your head of delegation or a colleague. Report any losses as they occur; don't wait till the end of a mission. If your

organization does not provide such insurance, you would be well advised to seek independent cover. It could be costly.

## A WORD ON CAMERAS

It might be very tempting to take your camera or camcorder on mission. It's natural to want to keep mementos of people and places you visit. It's also quite natural to want to send such mementos home to keep your family and friends in the picture. Beware! Such completely innocent activities could lead you into grave danger, since you could be accused of spying, seeking military information, etc. It's just not worth the risk.




**My advice is definitely not to take your cameras on field missions.** Keep them in your house or firm base for use there or on vacation, but not in the field itself. Even if you are using a camera for the most innocuous purpose, this fact could be used against you by anyone wishing to cause you or your organization trouble. Most mobile phones today incorporate a camera and some are capable of recording short video clips. The above therefore applies here as well. Even if you did not intend to use the camera or video facility, the simple fact that you were carrying it could be used against you. Sorry, but my strong advice is to **leave any mobile phone with a camera function at your firm base.**

*CHAPTER 8*

# MANAGEMENT ASPECTS OF SAFETY AND SECURITY

Let us now turn to some aspects of security that you should consider as a manager or a head of office/delegation. Remember, we are concentrating on security, not the whole range of your responsibilities.

We will look at the role of the head, with some ideas for contingency planning and your responsibilities in that area as well as your responsibilities in relation to fire precautions, a matter often completely overlooked.

## THE ROLE OF HEAD OF OFFICE/DELEGATION

A manager can have a large staff, say 30 expatriates and 200-300 local staff, or even larger. On the other hand, you might be sent as the only expatriate to an office with any number of local staff. The guidelines set out below apply equally well to both ends of the spectrum.

### Basic considerations

In terms of security and safety, you might wish to consider the following.

**The security threat to your staff in your area.** Identify dangerous groups (military, rebels, guerrillas, etc.). Find out what specific weapons (outlined earlier) are being used and ensure that your staff are aware of ways to reduce the risks. The threat from common criminals should also be considered. Regular briefings and the sharing of information on the security situation are most important.

**The mission.** Whom do you intend to assist (type of victim, type of project and location)? With which parties to the conflict is it essential for you to establish correct relations in order to achieve your aim?

**Personal safety of your staff.** Consider security for equipment and buildings such as offices, houses, warehouses and garages. Should shelters be considered? If you build obvious sandbagged

shelters or improve a cellar, will that "raise eyebrows" locally? There are times when such action can make the locals and even the military uneasy. Do you know something they don't?! You do not want to create panic or raise suspicion. It is an important point to consider. You might order sandbags, 3M paper, etc. but then simply store them. If the situation deteriorates, you will have them readily available.

**Fire safety.** I can say without fear of contradiction that most heads forget the importance of fire safety. In a large office you might delegate this and other aspects to your administrator or deputy. But you might well have to take the first step. We will cover the main points concerning fire precautions later in this chapter.

**Contingency planning for the unexpected.** Quite clearly, contingency planning is your responsibility as the boss. This concerns not just how you will evacuate in a deteriorating situation but also such matters as medical evacuation of staff and building up reserves for a period of high risk (see later section). You might, for example, ensure that you have an adequate supply in your stores of 3M paper, sandbags and the tools to fill them.

**Vehicles and driving safety.** You should lay down rules based on the guidelines set out earlier: night driving, speed, maintenance, checks on spares, tools, etc. Ensure that new arrivals are given driver training. You should not expect them to ask or to be conversant with your particular vehicles.

**Conduct of your staff on and off duty.** The conduct element naturally includes your local staff and we have covered many aspects already. Ill-considered behaviour can have a dramatic impact on your safety and security. You must translate the guidelines into the **rules** that you want. **Set the standard and the example** and insist that those rules be obeyed. This is a small paragraph but one of the most important aspects of your job in terms of both security and general leadership.

**Security instructions.** You will need to draft security instructions for your team if these do not already exist. Even if they do, check them to ensure that they reflect exactly what you want.

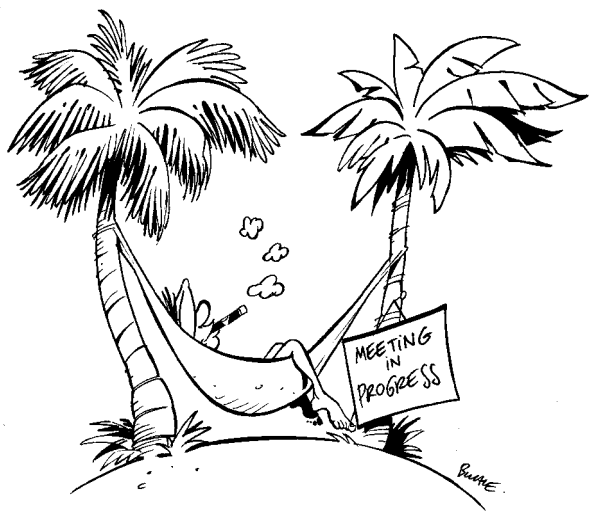
**Health supervision.** Do you really have to bother about supervising staff health? Well, unfortunately, yes. Or you might delegate

this matter to a doctor or nurse on your staff. If you do not regularly check and insist on high standards, you can quickly lose a whole team to any manner of strange and unpleasant gastro-intestinal problem.

## Stress management

Stressed-out colleagues are a security risk to themselves and to others. I will not dwell long on this as far more qualified experts have written on the subject. It is now an area that most humanitarian organizations take very seriously. Experts sitting in the tranquillity of Geneva or New York are, however, not a whole lot of use to you as the boss in the field. You should take their advice and the guidelines they lay down but, at the end of the day, a great deal of stress management and preventive measures in particular rely on your management and leadership. What sort of practical measures am I talking about?

Your leadership and management are vital to reducing stress. The keys are concern for, and understanding of, your staff and their problems. Always be ready to listen. You should not be afraid to give advice or to chide someone if he or she does something wrong. It shows that you care for them. Enforce good security rules



and procedures. Ensure good briefings and the sharing of information.

Days off are important. You might feel it necessary to work every day of the week until midnight. If you do this, you are not setting a good example. Others will also stay because they feel they must. The whole team soon becomes extremely tired and stressed. Insist on keeping a leave book. Ensure that your staff take regular breaks and do the same yourself. You are not indispensable. Delegate tasks and take rest.

You are responsible for the welfare of your staff. You can reduce stressful and annoying aspects of life by having the right ideas and pressing for improvements. Can your delegates phone home when they want to? If not, why? How can you arrange it? Contact with home and loved ones can do a great deal to reduce stress. Can they send and receive mail in a reasonable amount of time? If not, how can you improve the situation? Can you arrange for goodies like cigarettes, drinks, soap, magazines, videos, etc. to be brought in? Not all these things are possible, but with some thought and effort, each and every situation can be improved.

Many features of stress can be relieved by good leadership and management. The experts will certainly guide you and it is your duty to study their advice. But you are the one who can do most to anticipate stress and prevent it from reaching unacceptable levels. Do your utmost to recognize the first small sparks of stress and extinguish them before they burst into flame and "burn out" your precious staff. Further information can be obtained from the booklet by Barthold Bierens de Haan, *Coping with stress,* published by the ICRC.

## CONTINGENCY/EVACUATION PLANS

Here we are talking about outline planning for the "What if...?" In the very busy day-to-day life of an organization in the field, this important aspect of safety and security is frequently forgotten. Attitudes such as "It's so far in the future," or "It will never happen to us," tend to prevail. It may indeed never happen, but if it does and you have planned for it then you and your team will be in a far better position to cope. The plans need not be detailed (indeed, detail might be counter-productive). Situations never turn out quite as we

imagine them. Outline planning, where we consider the main or common factors, nevertheless remains a valid and useful tool for dealing with the unforeseen.

You might well have these plans issued to you by your organization's headquarters. They will naturally be very general, dealing as they must with a broad range of operations world-wide. It will be necessary for you to add some substance to these outline plans to make them relevant to your particular set of circumstances.

We cannot attempt here to deal with every possible contingency. But by dealing with three important ones, we can illustrate the way to go about such planning and the sort of factors you might wish to consider.

We will therefore look at plans for:

- a prolonged stay in a hostile environment;
- a partial evacuation;
- a complete evacuation.

When drawing up such plans, it is important to consider "trigger" – or decision – points that will initiate their implementation. The reason for this is that, in the event, both you and your organization will have a reasonable idea of what is expected of you and how you might well react. These triggers could be important since the situation may deteriorate rapidly, perhaps in a matter of hours. Radio communication may be impossible. There could be tremendous pressure on the head of office or delegation. Pre-planning, prior discussion and agreement between you and your headquarters regarding trigger points will facilitate the decision-making process. It should ensure that if it is impossible to consult headquarters, the right decisions will be made.

Let's now look at the outline-planning factors for our three scenarios. Perhaps I should point out that these plans are based on a real situation, although I will disguise the time and place. The factors considered are based on that situation. Thus, not all will necessarily be relevant to your planning.

The aim is to illustrate how simple it is to do some contingency planning. There is nothing mystical about it. It is simply a matter of common sense and will take an hour or so of your time. Once

written, the plans can be put in your bottom drawer. You can add to them when you have a new idea or you can rapidly amend them if the situation changes.

## Planning for a prolonged stay

Let us look at a typical scenario. The town in which you are based comes under heavy attack. You received little warning and evacuation is impossible. There is now no option but to remain and make the best of it until the situation has calmed down.

To plan for this type of rapidly deteriorating situation, you might consider the following.

**Aim.** The aim here would be to provide passive protection for your team over a period of two weeks in a deteriorating situation.

**Use of cellars.** A prolonged attack on the town will at times require the team to move down to the cellar for greater protection. Space will be limited as it is likely that other people from the town will have the same idea. Space for vehicles will be a problem. You should plan for at least one vehicle to be parked below in order to give yourself some mobility and assist with communications. Alternatively, you might designate one cellar for personnel and the other for two vehicles.

**Alternative antennas.** It would be prudent today to order two more HF and VHF antennas as well as coaxial cables in case the present ones are destroyed. Plans for the routing of the cables to the cellar should be made and the cables laid now.

**Radio.** Decide now what radio equipment should move to the cellar and include SATCOM.

**Food, medical supplies, water, cooking utensils.** Obtain and store necessary reserve items for a quick move below.

**Bedding.** Store sleeping bags in the office close to the cellar.

**Batteries, candles, generator.** Store an adequate supply of batteries and candles and include spare fuel for the generator. Remember wet batteries for radio back-up.

**Heating.** Store three or four heaters plus fuel for them.

**Protection.** Build a sandbagged blast wall at the entrance to the cellar. Use empty oil drums partially filled with soil for the entrance to the vehicle cellar so that they are easier to roll aside if required.

**Lighting.** Rig up a string of bulbs on wire to attach to the generator.

**Pallets.** Move some spare wooden pallets from the warehouse to the cellar to raise the floor level in case of heavy rain.

Note that you should perhaps multiply all items mentioned above (including food, medical supplies, etc.) as much as possible in case numerous others take refuge with you.

### Planning for evacuation

You might consider two levels of planning here: partial evacuation and complete evacuation (withdrawal).

This is a rather contentious area for a number of reasons, as I discovered when involved in the real thing. Some organizations will not wish to withdraw at all. They are there to serve the victims and there they will stay. The ethos and traditions of an organization are important. It is not for me to suggest that you must pack up and go at the slightest hint of danger. However, even profoundly held convictions and traditions sometimes have to adjust to the harsh realities of life. Some form of contingency planning for a worst-case scenario is therefore always prudent.

Another real problem on the ground could be that no one in your team will wish to withdraw. You will have the hardest of jobs persuading people to be included in a partial withdrawal, for example. Everyone will have an excellent argument for staying and no one wants to desert colleagues. This situation will constitute a real test of your leadership. Sometimes a partial withdrawal makes a great deal of sense. You are not seen as deserting the victims in their hour of need; you retain your credibility and uphold your organization's traditions. At the same time, you reduce the risks by reducing your number. By means of sensible planning, you retain the key staff that can still actually achieve something. The others, whose work is now impossible, leave. This helps you as they are out of harm's way and you do not have to find work, food or shelter for them. They can always return very quickly once the situation has stabilized.

## Partial evacuation

A possible scenario might be as follows. Partial evacuation is now necessary as the collapse of the town is imminent. Field work will now be impossible, though limited assistance to the town's population might continue.

The following planning factors might be considered.

**Aim.** The aim here would be to evacuate elements of the staff, leaving a core of expertise in place.

**Assumption.** Assume that evacuation could still take place by air if the airport is intact and secure. Otherwise, it will have to be by road.

**Personnel.** Decide now on the numbers and names of those to be evacuated. In order to spare yourself the arguments outlined above, you might wish to keep the list confidential. There is also a good case, I suppose, for making it clear at an early stage who will go. It will certainly save you valuable time when the situation might have grown more tense! Will your list include local staff? Will they in fact want to go?

**Trigger point.** Discuss the trigger point beforehand with your main office or headquarters. Agree with them on the trigger point for a partial withdrawal, such as when a full attack on the town is imminent. Should it come to that, there may simply be no time for lengthy discussions. Your radio antenna might have been destroyed, for example. Delay could be dangerous. Prior agreement will give you the confidence to implement your plan. If your headquarters knows the plan, they will have a pretty good idea what you are doing even if they can't speak to you. They should give you as much prior assistance as possible to enable you to implement your pre-arranged plan should the occasion arise.

**Liaison.** In some situations you might well need to establish a close liaison with the UN or the military in order to get up-to-date information on the situation, for protection, for information on the local people, evacuees, etc. You might need to arrange rendezvous points for military guides, fix the timing, organize extra transport. You might well decide to appoint a team member as your liaison officer with the UN or the military.

**Personal belongings.** What kit will your people be able to take? It is likely to be very little. The rest should be packed and stored.

### Full evacuation

Here the scenario might be as follows. The situation is so grave that your work is now impossible. Your lives are being put at unnecessary risk. The military have asked you to leave for your own safety.

In addition to the factors already considered for a partial evacuation, you should now also consider the following.

**Aim.** The aim here would be to evacuate all remaining personnel.

**Assumption.** Assume that the airport is now out of service. Evacuation by air is therefore most unlikely. You will have to move by road. You must assume that the parties to the conflict will allow safe passage.

**Transport.** Do you possess enough vehicles for everyone? Is there sufficient fuel?

**Negotiations/clearance.** You will have to carefully inform the parties involved and arrange safe passage with them.

**Sensitive material.** Have all sensitive material destroyed before leaving.

**Food.** Is there sufficient food for everyone during the journey?

**Money.** You will need ready cash for the unforeseen!

## Fire precautions

This section is included under the general heading of management because it is very often forgotten completely. The loss of a warehouse or office through fire could jeopardize your work. Let us list some simple guidelines that you might use in your own situation.

Do you have sufficient fire extinguishers? The number naturally depends very much on the size of the office or warehouse. In a small, two-storey house, for example, it would be sensible to have two on each floor and a separate one for the kitchen. Ensure that they are not all placed together but spread out. Check when they were last refilled (each should have an attached label indicating this). They should be serviced or refilled once a year. Does

everyone know how to operate the fire extinguishers? Use an old one and demonstrate every now and again, perhaps when you organize a fire drill.

If fire extinguishers are unobtainable, use fire buckets, some filled with sand, the others with water. Place them in accessible positions on each floor.


Do you have an alternative or emergency exit? Can it be used? Is it blocked or locked? Is it easy to find the key in an emergency? Can those on the upper floors escape? Is there an outside fire escape? Should you get ladders (possibly folding ladders) to be put out in an emergency?

Do you have a fire evacuation plan or drill? Does everyone know what it is? Have you ever practised it?

Do you have an alarm system, or even a bell or a piece of metal hanging up with a hammer to bang it?

Should you order smoke alarms? They are cheap enough and battery-operated.

Is the warehouse fire-proof? Have you separated dangerous and inflammable stores from the rest? Can you find a separate storage facility for these dangerous items?

Would it be useful to put up some posters to make people more aware of fire danger?

Simple precautions can prevent a fire from turning into a disaster. Check to make sure that you have good fire-fighting equipment and that you know how to use it, and organize fire drills at least every six months.

*CHAPTER 9*

# SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Here we will deal with situations that are perhaps less common but with which humanitarian volunteers have been faced in the past.

We will look at two eventualities: being caught in a state of siege (a situation where you might not actually be a hostage but nevertheless find yourself cut off in a hostile environment) and actually being a hostage. We will look at survival guidelines for both.

## A STATE OF SIEGE

The following scenario is based on a situation I faced in 1995. Our town was being attacked. We faced threats from all manner of weapons, from aircraft to artillery. No effective work was possible. Our office was on the outskirts of the town but all our houses were in the town centre. Plans to evacuate non-essential personnel had been made but the battle moved so quickly that no evacuation was possible. Here are some examples of how we dealt with this rather difficult situation.

All staff were moved from the town to the office and all personal possessions – and as many beds as possible – were brought with them.

Reserves of food and water were already stored in the office but we bought up as much as we could locally as well.

There were shelters at the office and each staff member was assigned to a specific shelter so that everyone could move to them quickly and without confusion. In the event, we spent a great deal of time in those shelters.

Personnel from other organizations joined us as their offices were in the town. We therefore had to meet their needs as well. Our numbers almost doubled. Some local staff, frightened of staying in the town, also had to be accommodated.

As the battle for the town began in earnest, elements of those defending it began to fall back. As they did so, our office became the focus of their attention. Although we were not personally

attacked, everything we possessed except personal clothing and two radios were taken by them. The looting lasted for three days. In all we were in a state of siege for 10 days.

It was out of the question for us to actively prevent the looting. Trying to do so would have put us in greater danger. An attempt was made to persuade the looters to stop, but they proceeded on the grounds of military necessity and we gradually lost all our important vehicles and equipment.


## Enduring a state of siege

Avoid heroics. Try by all means to persuade looters to leave important items for your use. (This worked for us to the extent that two radios were left with us.) But you should not push too hard because in a tense and dangerous situation you might be harmed. Keep very calm; losing your temper will achieve nothing and could place you in great danger.

Create, as best you can, a "safe area" within your office. This is an area where everyone can gather during looting, for example. Keep out of the way and let them take what they want. Barricade your

safe area as best you can. You can certainly try to have them agree that this area should be left alone.

Assign one or two people only to the task of dealing with those who forcibly enter your office. It is a very trying and dangerous task. The head of office will obviously assume this role but might need some help. Choose those who can cope, who will not over-react and who have an air of authority. It is hopeless and dangerous for everyone to become involved. Just keep the others out of the way and ensure that they maintain as low a profile as possible.

Inform the team members of what is going on. They will be frightened but a regular flow of information will enable you to explain and to alleviate a great deal of apprehension and fear. If you as the boss are too tied up in dealing with the intruders, name another to carry out this very important briefing task.

Insist that any alcohol be simply thrown away. It is too dangerous in these situations for someone to get drunk. He may create a situation that places him and others in danger.

You may well have to assign members of your staff to act as cooks and perform other domestic chores. The local staff might simply not be there.

Create distractions to take people's mind off immediate events. You could perhaps form a team to work on an evacuation plan. A guitarist and a sing-song can be a useful distraction.

As a precaution, before any unwelcome visitors appear, hide an amount of cash on the premises. It must be very well concealed; if found, it could cause additional problems. As the situation stabilizes you will need it simply to buy food.

Be calm and keep strictly to the facts in briefing your headquarters by radio or SATCOM. Neither play down nor exaggerate the situation. Officers at your headquarters must have the most reliable information on the basis of which they, in turn, may be able to negotiate and resolve the situation.

## HOSTAGE SURVIVAL

Whole books have been written about the taking of hostages and the best way of behaving as a victim or as someone responsible for dealing with the crisis. Happily, I have never been taken hostage so I

have relied here on expert documents and personal recollections of those who have. This section gives a very brief summary of their advice in case of abduction.

The immediate and possibly the most difficult problem for someone taken hostage is the fear of not knowing what is to follow. You should therefore be aware of the problems and conditions that might have to be faced immediately following capture, and in the longer term, as well as of the steps that will be taken to secure your release and of the attitude you should adopt in that regard.

## Abduction

The time of actual abduction is the most dangerous. The kidnappers are nervous, the victim does not always realize what is happening and the situation can very easily get out of hand. You should remain as calm and composed as possible, particularly when being transported to the kidnappers' hideout. Talking to the kidnappers is recommended, provided this does not make them even more nervous.

An important rule to be followed by anyone subjected to an abduction attempt is that **escape must not be considered.** Heroism may lead to death at the hands of a nervous and inexperienced member of the kidnapping group.

## Post-capture

The post-capture period is likely to be difficult and unpleasant, particularly in contrast to the comfortable conditions in which the average victim normally has been living.

Post-capture shock is a major physiological and psychological problem. Capture, when completely unexpected, results in severe trauma brought about by the total change of situation. In such circumstances, the victim's entire world is thrown into chaos and confusion: the captors assume a position of superiority and dominance, and the hostage experiences deep depression.

It is important for the victim to recognize this situation and accept that he or she must obey any order given, and then to take steps to restore a sense of self-esteem and personal dignity at the earliest opportunity.

## Health

No matter who the captors are, and however primitive the living conditions are, a conscious effort must be made to maintain your physical and mental health. In this connection it is important to note the following.

Physical health is more likely to be maintained by eating all food that is offered rather than refusing to accept it, however unattractive or repulsive it may be. A regular routine of exercises should also be carried out, even if you are confined to a cell.

Mental health is maintained by identifying and sticking to a system of your own personal values. Keep your mind active by whatever means may suit you. A conscious effort is needed in this respect. Some prisoners have spent long periods composing music in their heads, writing poetry, thinking of back pay, or designing the ideal house. It is healthy to focus such mental activity on the future, when you will again be free. If writing materials or books are available, these can be of considerable assistance. A great deal can be achieved by mental activity alone.

Maintaining self-discipline is essential in order to overcome the effects of the immediate environment and the inactivity imposed by it. A strict schedule should be observed and standards of tidiness and cleanliness upheld.

## The relationship with captors

Not all advantages are on the side of the abductors. It is important to remember that, for them, the hostage represents a valuable propaganda weapon and possible insurance against attack by security forces. The hostage is also their means of obtaining what they demand. A dead hostage is worthless to them.

When several people are kidnapped, it is essential to appoint one person to speak for the group, in order to present a common front and to give the kidnappers no opportunity for playing the hostages off against each other.

A situation can develop in which victim and captors both see themselves as sharing the same problems. The result is the growth of mutual sympathy and identity of outlook, known as the "Stockholm syndrome", so named after a case in which hostages

held by criminals for six days in a bank vault surrounded by security forces found themselves regarding the police as their enemies and the criminals as their protectors!

## Negotiation

Negotiating the release of a hostage is a matter for your organization's headquarters. It is extremely important to realize that action is being taken and that the hostage should not interfere with this process. Hostages should above all not allow themselves to be convinced, as certain kidnappers might try to do, that they have been abandoned by the outside world. Except in some special cases, you should not negotiate your own release, nor discuss what action may be taken by your organization. Such discussions would probably only serve to compromise the ongoing negotiations.

Another stress factor is anxiety about one's family, and it is therefore important that your organization concern itself very seriously and closely with any hostage's family members, providing them with every possible support.

## Release

A further period of high risk may occur when release approaches. There may be a rise in tension amongst the guards. When the time for release comes, you will have to proceed with great care.

Specifically:

- Pay very close attention to the orders that your captors give you.
- Obey these orders immediately.
- Don't make sudden or unexpected moves.
- Stay alert; if things go wrong, you may have to make a run for it.
- Be prepared for delays and disappointments.

## Hostage survival check-list

**Do:**

- remain calm; if capture is inevitable, accept it and follow orders;
- recognize *the fact* that you are now a captive and mentally accept your change of circumstances;

- give your captors details of any medical treatment you have been receiving;
- accept and eat food that is given to you, even if it is unpalatable;
- prepare mentally for a long wait, perhaps many months, before your release;
- adopt a realistic attitude of discreet scepticism towards information passed on to you by your captors;
- systematically occupy your mind with constructive and positive thoughts;
- plan a daily programme of activity, including daily physical exercise, and adhere to it;
- try to keep an accurate record of time, even if your watch is taken away from you;
- take advantage of any comforts or privileges offered to you by your captors, like books, newspapers or access to the radio; ask for them;
- keep as clean as circumstances permit; ask for adequate washing and toilet facilities;
- develop, if possible, a good rapport with your captors and try to earn their respect; undertake a bit of advertising, telling them about the work of your organization;
- beware of the possible temptation to and risks involved in permitting yourself to identify with their cause.

**Do not:**

- antagonize your captors unnecessarily – they have you in their power;
- permit yourself to be drawn into conversations about controversial subjects such as politics and religious beliefs;
- allow yourself to become either over-depressed or over-optimistic;
- commit physical violence or verbal aggression;
- attempt to escape;
- allow yourself to become convinced that you have been abandoned by your organization or by your family.

*CHAPTER 10*

# FIRST AID

Serious injury is a major threat in conflict and post-conflict situations in which humanitarian staff work. Knowing how to handle an incident resulting in casualties – that is, knowing simple first-aid principles – can save lives, even when you have only basic equipment.

It is important to realize that first aid is a *practical* skill. To be effective requires practical training and at least some equipment. When you have read this section, you should reflect on whether you are adequately prepared. To fail to plan for dealing with a serious injury is to plan to fail when the day comes.

## THREATS

The types of injury encountered will be different depending on whether you are working in a conflict zone or a non-conflict environment. In the latter, ''blunt'' (force-of-impact) trauma from road accidents and from falls predominate. In this case, it is paramount to prevent injury in the first place. The commonest cause of death following a road accident is a head injury, about which you can do very little without speedy access to advanced medical treatment. Nevertheless, there are critical actions you can take to save life and prevent further injury.

Injuries in conflict zones are dominated by ''penetrating'' trauma (stab wounds, gunshot, fragments produced by an explosion), burns and blast injuries (mines, military munitions, improvised explosive devices). Mines and unexploded munitions remain a threat long after the conflict is over. Anti-personnel mines are typically designed to blow off a foot. By contrast, a cluster bomblet that is picked up by an inquisitive child will result in upper limb and face injuries. For your own safety, it is critical that you be aware of the danger from mines and booby traps and how to avoid them.

Studies of war injuries conclude that bleeding accounts for 50% of deaths and the commonest cause of avoidable death is bleeding from wounds on limbs. This is preventable if you follow the simple rules set out below. For patients who are unresponsive, simple manoeuvres to keep the airway open may prevent death and sustain the casualty until advanced aid is available.

Whether you are working in a conflict zone, helping in a natural disaster or providing aid to a refugee population, the greatest threat to the casualty is time. The ''golden hour'' following injury represents the best opportunity for intervention to save the critically wounded. An evacuation plan is therefore essential if you don't want to be too late in dealing with injuries (including those to your own staff).

## INJURY PATTERNS

Injury patterns following a **motor-vehicle crash** can be predicted by considering the mechanics of injury. For example, there are patterns consistent with head-on, side-impact and rollover crashes that vary according to whether a seat belt is worn. Seat belts have greatly reduced head and face injuries (impact with dashboard/windscreen) and chest injuries (impact with the steering wheel).

Following an **explosion,** most injuries sustained are from *fragments*, which are either part of the ''bomb'' or debris propelled by the explosion (glass, stones, wood, etc.). For those close to an explosion, injury may result from the *blast wave* (a wave of pressure that compresses air-filled cavities in the human body and can result in severe bleeding into the lungs, bowel perforation and rupture of the eardrum), the *blast wind* (the whoosh of air that follows behind the blast wave and can rip off limbs), *burns*, and *crush injuries* from collapsing buildings.

The severity of injury from **gunshot** depends on the path taken by the bullet (clearly it is more serious if it passes through your head than through your foot) and the energy that is transferred (a rifle bullet has more energy to give up than a pistol bullet). ''High-energy-transfer'' wounds can cause serious damage some distance around the trajectory of the bullet in the body.

Body armour (the ''bulletproof vest'') undoubtedly saves lives and has greatly reduced the proportion of torso injuries in conflict. If you are at high risk and have been given a bulletproof vest, wear it.

## SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

Any incident involving casualties can be approached in the same systematic manner – control then ACT (Assess, Communicate, Triage):

- First take charge – use the people you have as effectively as possible.
- Look to see whether there is any further danger and, if necessary, move survivors (both injured and uninjured) to a place of safety.
- Get help by whatever means you can (radio, mobile phone, driver, runner). The information you need to convey is your Exact location, the Type of incident, the Hazards, the Access (is the road blocked?), the Number of casualties and the Emergency response you require (this spells ETHANE).
- Then sort casualties into groups in order of priority for treatment (this is *triage*): they will need to be re-sorted later into priorities for evacuation. A simple system, known as the ''triage sieve'', can be used by any trained first-aider:
  - Those with difficulty breathing or significant bleeding (external and internal) have top priority for treatment. By contrast, the ''walking wounded'' have the lowest priority.[24]
  - Where resources are limited, difficult decisions may have to be made regarding how much treatment is given to someone who cannot be saved.

## TREATMENT

The treatment of the seriously injured casualty can also be approached systematically, following the ABC (airway-breathing-circulation) approach.

### AIRWAY, BREATHING AND CIRCULATION

In the case of an unresponsive casualty, the first priority is to ensure that the *airway* (the air passage to the lungs) is open. If it is obstructed by a foreign body (food, pieces of denture, blood clot), try to remove the object with your fingers. Then lift the casualty's chin up so that the jaw is perpendicular to the ground. This position will prevent the tongue from blocking the airway. If there is blunt trauma or you have other reason to suspect a spinal injury, make sure that the head is held straight (nose in line with breastbone) to prevent further damage. Any unresponsive casualty who is

[24] *Triage* in Advanced Life Support Group (2002) *Major incident medical management and support*, London, BMJ Publishing.

breathing unassisted should be carefully rolled onto his side (the ''recovery position'') and stabilized in this position by flexing his upper knee and placing it on the ground in front of the other leg. Then his chin should be gently tipped back to keep the airway open. This position will prevent him from asphyxiating if he vomits.

The second priority is to check for *breathing* difficulties (a feeling of ''shortness of breath'' or a breathing rate over 20 or less than 10 per minute in an adult). Although there is nothing you can do about this (unless you have special training), you will at least be able to identify those who have a high priority for evacuation.

*Circulation* is assessed by measuring the pulse rate. If the pulse is fast (more than 100/minute in an adult) following injury, you should assume significant bleeding externally and/or internally. Your priority is to stop any visible bleeding. Most bleeding will stop if pressure is applied (for example, by means of a dressing) and the affected limb is elevated. With life-threatening bleeding from a limb that cannot be controlled by pressure and elevation, it is acceptable to improvise a tourniquet *as a last resort* (i.e. tightening a belt or other material around the limb above the wound and thus stopping the flow of blood). If you see massive bleeding as you approach the casualty, get someone to press on the wound with a dressing while you quickly assess the airway and breathing.

## Broken bones and burns

Bleeding and pain from broken bones can be reduced with splints. You can improvise a splint from items of clothing (scarves, belt, folded blanket) and rigid materials (a piece of wood, for example). An injured leg can be splinted with the other leg, if it is uninjured.

Relief of pain from burns can be obtained by pouring cold (clean) water on them for 10 to 15 minutes. However, this should be avoided in cases of extensive burns as it will cause the casualty's body temperature to drop. Thin plastic wrap (of the type used for sandwiches) is a simple and effective dressing, but **do not wrap the burn tightly. Do not use this material to cover the face. Do not cover chemical burns at all.**

Finally, consider whether the casualty is suffering from cold (remove wet clothing, dry him and cover him with blankets) or heat (remove/loosen clothing, spray with water and fan him).

### Cardio-pulmonary resuscitation

When the patient stops breathing and the heart stops beating, cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) (or ''basic life support'') is a useful skill to have! However, it is only one link in a necessary chain of events that involves access to a defibrillator (to deliver an electric shock to the heart) and more advanced treatment. If you are in a remote situation without easy access to more advanced medical support, the reality is that the patient will probably not survive. In these circumstances, resuscitation (artificial respiration and external cardiac compression) should be discontinued after a maximum of 20 minutes.

## EQUIPMENT

The basic equipment you will need to provide effective first aid is shown in the table below.

| **Equipment** | **Comment** |
|---|---|
| Scissors | To cut clothing |
| Large ''field dressings'' | Minimum of 2, for bleeding wounds |
| Triangular bandages (squares of cloth 70-100 cm each side, folded corner-to-corner to form triangles) | Minimum of 2, for splinting |
| Synthetic gloves | For protection against blood-borne disease |
| Pocket mask or face-shield | Optional, to assist with providing CPR |
| Tourniquet | Optional (can be improvised, but commercial tourniquet is advisable) |

Note that training is required to use this equipment safely and effectively.

*CHAPTER 11*

# HEALTH ON MISSION

When you are in a conflict zone it is extremely important to be as healthy as possible. After all, you have volunteered to help others – not to be a burden and require help yourself! This chapter is not just about rare and scary diseases that can kill you in a few hours; it is about some simple precautions to minimize the chances that your body will start to ache, overheat or seriously distract you from the important work you have to do.

These suggestions may seem obvious. Unfortunately many humanitarian workers don't bother, often because they are deployed at short notice, have other priorities, or adopt a macho attitude and assume they are immune to mosquitoes, microbes and accidents.

Here is a simple list of what to do *before going on mission.*

## IMMUNIZATION

Get all vaccinations that you might need *before* you become eligible for field duty. You may not have time once the phone rings telling you to be at destination X in 48 hours. If you are on an emergency roster or there is a good chance you will be deployed, make sure you are up to date *before* that phone call.

**You must always be covered for hepatitis A and B, typhoid, diphtheria, tetanus and poliomyelitis**.

For most missions you should also be covered for rabies.

Other diseases you are well advised to think about ahead of time are:

- yellow fever – present in much of sub-Saharan Africa and much of Central and South America (vaccination is compulsory for all ICRC staff headed for any field assignment);
- meningitis – the ''meningitis belt'' spans much of Central, East and West Africa, and some other regions;
- Japanese encephalitis – a risk in South and South-East Asia;

- cholera (a good oral cholera vaccine exists and is perhaps a wise precaution for most war zones, natural disasters or chronic complex emergencies).

But this list is by no means exhaustive. Get expert advice as early as possible on places where you could be posted (useful websites listed at end of chapter).

## KITS, SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT

Most organizations will ensure you are equipped with adequate first-aid kits. Some organizations advise you to purchase them yourself. If you are not issued with the necessary equipment, you should take the following with you:

- **Malaria prevention.** The most important items are: insecticide-treated mosquito nets (permethrin is commonly used for this), DEET-based insect repellent, malaria-prevention tablets, a standby treatment kit.

- **Diarrhoea treatment.** Take at least a few packets of oral rehydration salts, loperamide (Imodium) tablets and a course of ciprofloxacin tablets 250 mg or 500 mg. Also take water-purification tablets to help avoid drinking contaminated water.
- **Blood-borne diseases prevention.** A kit containing syringes, sterile needles and other basic supplies is essential for everyone travelling to a developing country. If you are travelling extensively by road or light aircraft in areas where hepatitis B and HIV are common and local blood supplies unreliable (for example, Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa), consider taking a kit containing intravenous fluids.
- **Commonly used medicines.** A general kit is a wise precaution if you risk going far from good health care and if local supplies are erratic or untrustworthy. It should include any broad-spectrum antibiotics recommended by your medical experts, along with a careful explanation of when – and when not – to use them.

Other essentials *before* your mission:

- **You must have comprehensive, up-to-date travel-health insurance.**
- If you have any significant health problems (diabetes, high blood pressure, recurrent or serious depression or anxiety, etc.) and/or you have not had a medical check-up in the past 12 months, you should arrange to have this done by a physician experienced in travel medicine as early as possible (compulsory for ICRC staff before leaving for a mission).
- If you have any history of severe allergy (anaphylaxis), take with you two epinephrine (adrenalin) self-injection kits, so as to ensure that one is always available.
- If you suffer from asthma attacks, take two sets of inhalers, thus ensuring that one is always available.
- If you regularly take medication, take adequate supplies and a list of these medicines (with dosages and frequency) signed and stamped by your doctor.
- You should have immediate access to post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV, along with clear instructions for use, if you are giving any hands-on health care in areas where HIV/AIDS is common.

## TREATING INFECTIONS, PARASITES AND BITES

Infections, parasites and bites can turn nasty, so proper treatment is important.

### Malaria

As the old saying goes, ''An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.'' This certainly applies to malaria.

If you are in a malarial zone, this is an essential list:

- Take your malaria-prevention tablets (''chemo-prophylaxis'').
- Use a DEET-based insect repellent.
- Sleep under an insecticide-treated mosquito net.
- Keep skin covered as much as possible beginning an hour before dusk.
- Take a standby treatment kit.

Even if you take all these precautions, you may still get malaria, so whenever you travel more than eight hours from good medical care, take your malaria standby treatment kit with you. If you develop a fever, sweats and chills, a bad headache or other symptoms which could be malaria, have the test done as soon as possible by a reliable doctor or laboratory. If this is not possible, or if you don't trust the result, or if the correct treatment is not available, self-treat within 8-12 hours of your symptoms starting. In all cases you should put yourself under the care of a trusted doctor or other health worker as soon as possible. Malaria kills more people than war.

### Dengue fever

This is another mosquito-borne illness which can lay you out with amazing speed. The Aedes mosquito, which spreads this severe flu-like illness, tends to bite during the day, especially two hours before sunset. Dengue is common in both urban and rural areas of South America, the Caribbean and many Pacific islands, South and South-East Asia and parts of East Africa. Typical symptoms are high fever, severe headache, muscle and back pain, and feeling seriously ill. See a doctor, get a blood test (including a blood slide to rule out malaria), then rest, drink plenty of fluids and be patient. There is no cure available, but expert health care can be life-saving if (rare) complications set in.

### Viral haemorrhagic fevers

Lassa fever, ebola and marburg are the best known of these rare afflictions. There are regularly cases of lassa in rural areas of West Africa. Most viral haemorrhagic fevers are spread by close contact with infectious cases, some by mosquitoes or ticks. If you are deployed in areas where known outbreaks are occurring, get specialist advice. There are no effective cures, and prevention in the case of lassa, ebola and marburg consists in avoiding contact with infectious cases.

### Pneumonia and respiratory infections

These are especially common at times of stress, tiredness and overcrowding. The symptoms are usually obvious: cough, shortness of breath, fever and sometimes pain on deep breathing. These symptoms mean you should seek good medical advice as soon as possible. Timely treatment with effective antibiotics usually shortens these illnesses: good choices are amoxycillin 500 mg or co-amoxiclav (Augmentin) 625 mg every eight hours for seven days or, if you are allergic to penicillin, erythromycin 500mg four times a day for seven days. If you are deployed in a country where flu, including avian flu, or SARS is a known risk, follow any official guidelines carefully.

### Skin and wound infections

In hot climates, even small cuts, grazes, bites and other wounds can quickly get infected. Use an antiseptic cream or powder such as Cicatrin (neomycin/bacitracin). Cellulitis – hot, red skin spreading outwards from an infection or upwards from the feet and toes – can come on extremely rapidly. Start a high-dose antibiotic at once under medical supervision; for example, take amoxycillin 500 mg every eight hours or, if you are allergic to penicillin, erythromycin 500 mg four times daily. Any antibiotic should be taken for at least seven days. Always get good medical advice before acting. Self-treat only if medical advice is not possible.

### Bites from dogs and other animals

Clean bites scrupulously with soap and water. Get them seen by a doctor or other trusted health worker. These bites often become infected and in principle you should start a course of antibiotics even if no infection is obvious. The wound should not usually be

stitched, but allowed to heal over naturally. Make sure you have been immunized against tetanus. (That means a primary course of three injections in the past and a booster every 10 years.) If this is not the case, you will need a tetanus booster without delay. In addition, I hope you will have been immunized against rabies. (That means a primary course of three injections in the past and boosters regularly every three years.) If your rabies immunization is out of date or you are not sure, you will need to obtain human rabies immunoglobulin (HRIG) as rapidly as possible. HRIG can be hard to obtain, even in some capital cities, which is one reason why it is recommended that every humanitarian worker be up to date with rabies injections. Then all you will need are a further two injections of the same or equivalent vaccine you received before you left. The first dose must be given as soon as possible, the second between three and seven days later.

## Acute diarrhoea

Acute diarrhoea may not be life-threatening but, as we all know, it can be completely incapacitating. Maintain your fluid levels: drink at least one glass per visit to the toilet, or use oral rehydration packets or make up your own (eight level teaspoons of sugar plus one level teaspoon of salt to one litre of clean water). Use your diarrhoea kit or otherwise get hold of loperamide (Imodium or Arret) and take two, then one every four hours if the diarrhoea seriously persists. However, don't use this in the case of dysentery (bloody diarrhoea). Loperamide blocks but does not cure. Consider taking 500 mg of ciprofloxacin, or ''cipro'', as a single dose. This is an antibiotic which cures the majority of cases of traveller's diarrhoea. If your symptoms are severe and persistent, or if you have dysentery (i.e. blood and fever), take ''cipro'' 500 mg every day for three days. See a doctor if you are getting less and less well, have persistent vomiting, or pass bloody stools. You can prevent a lot of diarrhoea by avoiding salads, always eating food that is still hot from being cooked and making sure that anything you drink comes from a reliable bottled supply or, in the case of water and other beverages, has been either boiled or sterilized by iodine or chlorine tablets.

## Fevers

A high body temperature in the tropics (e.g. 39°C or over) should always be taken seriously, especially if you are in a malarious area

or have come from one in the past few weeks. You should always see a doctor if a fever persists or is worsening. It helps to be aware of some important causes of fever. These include: meningitis (severe headache, stiff neck, often a rash that does not fade when you touch it); acute bilharzia or katayama fever (fever often accompanied by wheezing and itching 20 or more days after swimming in an area where bilharzia is common, such as Lake Malawi); kidney infection or pyelonephritis (aching in the loin, often with nausea and shivering, usually with frequent urination that creates a burning sensation); typhoid (progressive fever and feeling increasingly ill – with no response to malaria treatment – usually accompanied by diarrhoea, sometimes by coughing and sometimes by a faint rash); blood poisoning (alternate shivering and sweating, often in the presence of an infected bite or other skin infection like a boil, or warm infected feet or legs). Heat stroke also gives a high temperature.

## CLIMATIC EXTREMES

Altitude sickness, hypothermia and and heat stroke can be dangerous.

### Too high

Beware of altitude sickness, which can set in at any height above 2,500-3,000 metres. If climbing or travelling to heights above this, try to take one or two days first to get acclimatized. Above 3,000 metres, try to sleep each night only 300 metres higher than the one before. Maintain your fluid levels. Consider taking acetazolamide (Diamox) to prevent or help treat the symptoms of altitude sickness. If you become short of breath while at rest, develop a persistent cough, experience an unrelieved pounding headache or feel drowsy, get down to a lower altitude as quickly as possible.

### Too cold

Hypothermia can quickly set in with any combination of cold weather, high elevation, strong wind and being wet. To prevent, wear several layers of loose-fitting clothing, with the outer layer waterproof, and cover head, neck and hands. Set up a ''buddy system'' so that individuals can look after one another. Danger signs are feeling intense cold, shivering, drowsiness or confusion. If

this happens to you or your companion, warm up without delay by having warm sweet drinks, sharing warmth in a sleeping bag, or having a bath with water up to 40°C. Check for signs of frostbite (an aching or numbness, often in the hands or feet with the skin feeling rock-hard and looking very pale or purplish). **Do not drink alcohol.**

### Too hot

Working in high temperatures brings with it the risk of heat stroke or sunstroke. This is when your body's cooling mechanism (including your ability to perspire) breaks down. Your body temperature is at or above about 39°C, you feel hot and dry, your pulse rate goes up and you may feel sick and confused. Get into a cool place at once, drink cold drinks if you are able, get sponged down, fanned or have cold water poured onto your body to evaporate away the heat. Get medical help, as this can be an emergency.

## AVOIDING ACCIDENTS

Accidents happen, but most can be avoided.

### Road accidents

Road accidents, perhaps more accurately termed ''road avoidables'', are more likely to see you return home in a body bag than any other non-conflict-related cause. Heed the following tips alongside the earlier advice on 4 × 4s:

- **Never drive after drinking and/or taking psychotropic (''recreational'') drugs.**
- Make time to have a good sleep before a long journey if you are to be at the wheel.
- If possible, drive with a companion and share the driving.
- Avoid driving at night.
- Keep to a sensible speed, even if the President or Chief of Staff is waiting for you at your destination.
- Always wear safety belts in the back and front seats even for the shortest journeys.
- Try to ensure any vehicle you use is well maintained and regularly serviced.
- Select and train any drivers you use with care and thoroughness.

- Keep a first-aid kit, leather gloves and a torch with spare batteries in the vehicle.
- Wear a crash helmet if riding on a motorbike.

If you are injured in an accident in a developing country, refuse a blood transfusion except in life-threatening situations.

These rules are obvious but all too easy to brush aside when other things seem more important.

Having survived the tarmac, mud and potholes on mission, take care during times of leisure.

## Swimming

**Do not drink alcohol then swim or dive.** At the seaside be aware of dangerous currents and undertow, areas known to have poisonous sea creatures, crocodiles or sharks. Stay within your depth unless you are a strong swimmer. Use life jackets for off-shore water sports or when using inflatable craft. **Never run along the side of a slippery pool; never dive into cloudy water or into a part of the pool whose depth you have not checked out.**

## Home and work

When you first move into a house or start working in a new environment, use your initiative and common sense to look out for any hazards. For example: exposed electric wiring; areas where it is easy to slip or fall; hazards from unlabelled bottles or substances; containers handy for water storage which may have contained pesticides or may be breeding-grounds for mosquitoes. Be aware of fire hazards: open stoves, open fires or cooking pans and the use of charcoal fires without adequate ventilation (asphyxiation danger).

During your rest and recreation, **do not lean against a hotel balcony, especially after drinking!** Some may be less well built than your body. Binge drinking is a multiple-risk factor, with dangers ranging from killing yourself – or your friends – in a road accident to contracting HIV because you forgot to take the necessary precautions.

Finally, if by the end of your mission (or after it's over) you feel more stressed out than you expect, get some personal debriefing or

counselling. This is not being a wimp, its being sensible. It may also get you back to the front line quicker – but *only* after a decent holiday as well. Sensible aid workers don't start a mission exhausted or with unresolved stress from the one before.

I will finish this section not by saying good luck, but *take care*.

## Useful websites

www.fco.gov.uk/travel
British Foreign & Commonwealth Office travel website.

www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk
An excellent UK health service travel-health website.

www.cdc.gov/travel
Official US travel-health website.

www.interhealth.org.uk
The InterHealth website has useful information and a travel-health supply catalogue with on-line ordering.

www.tropimed.com
Tropimed offers up-to-date information on travel medicine (with ICRC password and client no).

www.safetravel.ch
A Swiss French-language website with health tips for travellers.

*CHAPTER 12*

# TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Although earlier in my life I specialized in radio for two years, I know full well that if I make this section too technical, you will not read it. I promise that it will be non-technical and very brief!

So you have arrived in the field full of enthusiasm and ready to go. Just as with your strange new 4 × 4, you might also have had some basic instruction in the use of radios. This normally consists of how to turn it on and off — which of course is pretty vital! If you had the necessary time in your training, you might also have been told how to get the best out of the radios you possess. Being bombarded with so much information on so many subjects in such a short period, however, you might just have missed the significance of some of these points about radio communication.

First some general remarks:

- An organization should regard good communications procedures backed up by good and reliable equipment as an aid to security. Though it will not in itself ensure security, if you can communicate efficiently with your base or others in the field about security incidents or threats, then obviously your security is much enhanced.
- Before you use any form of communications equipment, **it is wise to think before you speak.** If it helps, jot down the key points you wish to cover in your message. This will save time and ensure clarity. There is nothing worse than someone getting on the radio and rambling on for what seems an eternity to end up saying something very simple. Always remember that someone might need to send an urgent life-or-death message, and this is impossible while you are clogging up the airways!
- Small mobile radios, SATCOM (satellite communications system) equipment and cellular phones are attractive and expensive items. Beware of thieves. Secure or hide your equipment if possible.
- Be aware that nothing you say on any form of communications system you are likely to be issued with is in any way secure. It is wise to assume that someone is listening to your transmission.

Again, think before you speak, and if the matter is sensitive, don't transmit, or at least be aware of the consequences.

Now let us look at the main types of communication equipment that you might encounter. Two are radios in our accepted sense of the word: VHF (very high frequency) and HF (high frequency). Then we have SATCOM or the satellite phone. We will also look, from a security point of view, at mobile phones and use of the internet.

I will not deal with individual makes or types. We are concerned only with the general guidelines on the use of each type. Let's look at each in turn.

## VHF RADIO

The VHF radio is the basic set that you will use in the field on a daily basis. It is a key piece of equipment in ensuring your safety. It is extremely easy to use. It is also very easy to abuse, and when you do that you fail to get the best out of it.

### The key to VHF

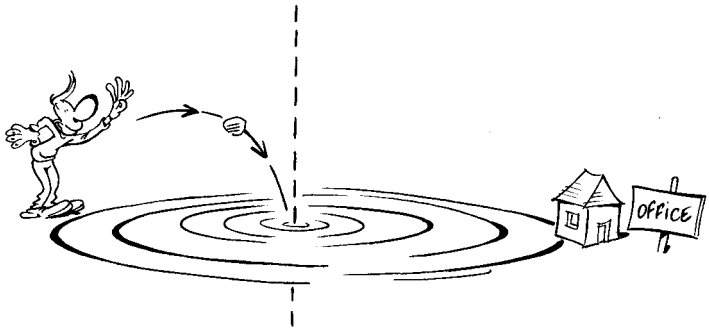
VHF radio waves travel in straight lines. Just imagine for a moment you are looking from your vehicle to your office in the distance through a set of binoculars. The radio wave from your set is following very much the same line of sight. If you can see your office, you can bet that you will be able to communicate with it. If there is a forest or mountain in the way, you cannot see your office; likewise, the radio waves travelling in "line of sight" cannot get through.

Obstacles such as trees, forests, houses and pylons impose a difficult path for VHF radio waves. Obstacles either absorb the waves completely or deflect them. If you want to improve communication, find your way to high ground and send your message from a point where there are no such obstacles in the way.

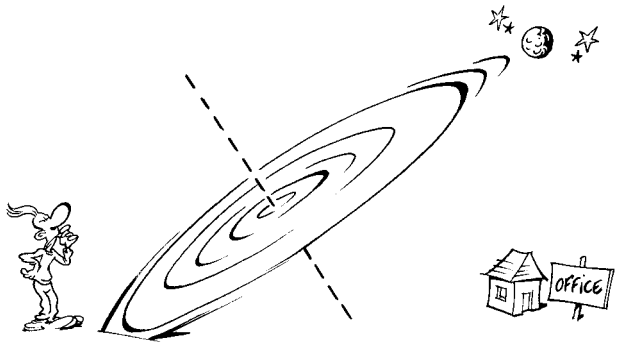
Distance is naturally an important factor. As your VHF wave is broadcast outward from the antenna, it spreads out like ripples of water on a pond after you drop a stone into it. The further away from you the signal travels, the weaker it becomes. Some sets are more powerful than others. You can experiment as you get to know your area and thus the distance over which you can communicate.

## Radio antennas

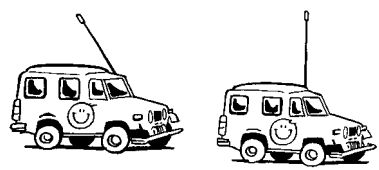
It is important always to ensure that your radio antenna is vertical. Why? Well, think of the pond again. The drawing shows in layman's terms what I mean.




You see that the waves are travelling in a plane horizontal to the antenna. If it is sloping backwards, you are sending excellent signals to Mars, perhaps, but not to your office!

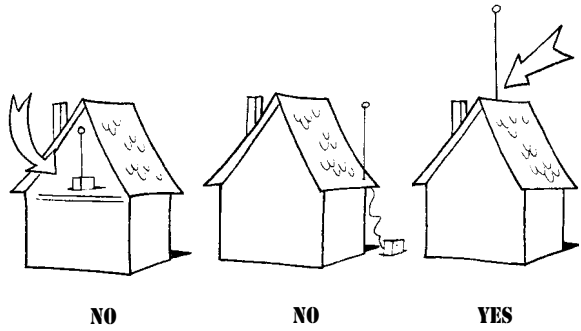



Just look the next time you are in the field and see how many of your vehicles have very aerodynamic sloped-back aerials. They look cool but they do not make for a very cool transmission. **All antennas must be vertical**.



**NO** **YES**

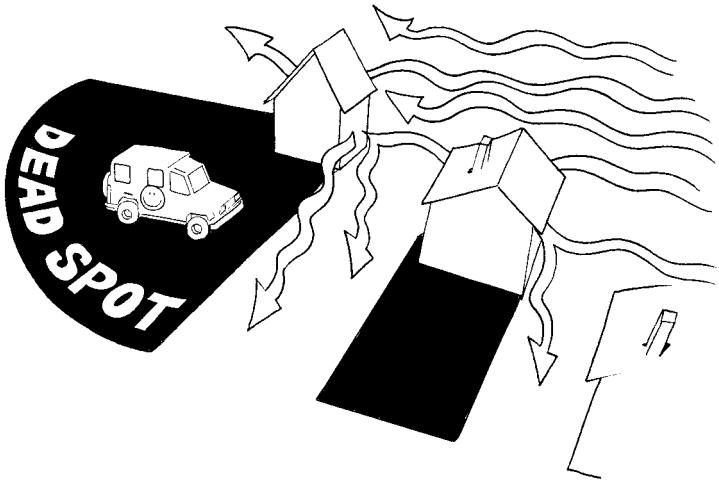
The same naturally applies to the VHF antennas on your office. Ensure that they are upright and, returning once again to points made earlier, ensure that they are on the highest part of the roof and not obscured by anything else up there. Place the antenna *outside* and not in the roof space inside (attic). I once saw one such antenna placed under a roof that happened to be made of corrugated iron. The VHF waves were immediately hindered, of course: the metal roof ensured that they were reflected and bounced around very nicely inside, while not actually leaving the building! "These radios are useless!" was the cry, until the next day when the antenna was moved outside and for the first time it was possible to communicate over vast distances.



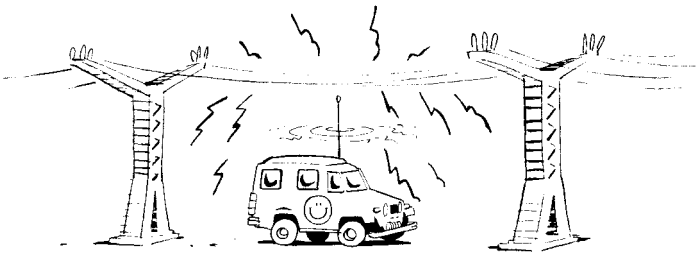

## Dead spots

"Now he *is* getting technical," I hear you moan. Not at all! Dead spots are a common feature of VHF. Because radio waves are deflected off in a different direction by obstacles in their path, there are times when excellent communication suddenly ceases and you hear nothing, or the message is completely distorted or broken up. You try and try again but there is no improvement. All that has happened is that you or the set with which you are in contact has changed position in such a way that there is now an obstacle between you. In short, you are in one of those infamous dead spots: radio waves are being deflected or weakened by obstacles somewhere in your vicinity and are just missing you.

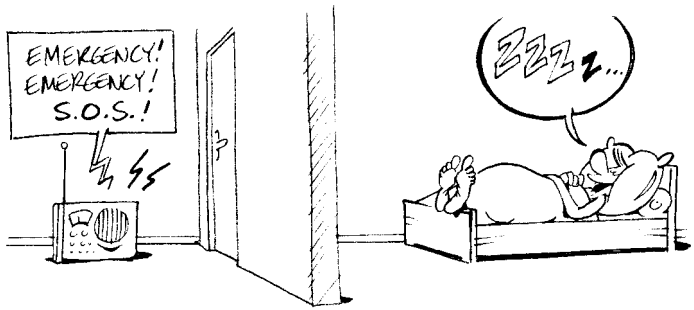
The solution is simply to move away slightly and try again. You will be amazed to see that sometimes only a few feet will make a dramatic difference.




**Overhead wires or pylons.** The electricity generated from overhead wires or pylons causes them to act as radiating antennas themselves and will affect your transmissions and your reception too; both will be distorted. So just move away from the wires and try to send your message again.



**Radios in the house.** Just a reminder: if you are required to take a radio home at night for emergency use, place it next to your bed and not in the hallway. You will simply not hear it if it is so far away.



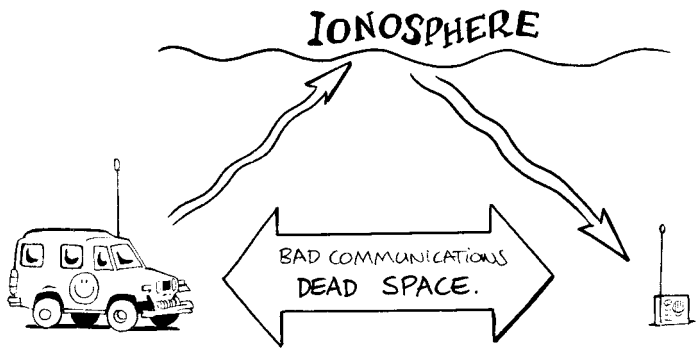

## HF RADIO

There is not a great deal to say about HF sets. Why? Because, unlike the VHF sets from which you can obtain better results through correct use, the HF transmission is very much in the hands of the gods. It is designed for longer-range communication and works by sending its signal skyward until it bounces off the electrically charged ionosphere and back to earth far away.

The space between the point of transmission and the place where the signal returns to earth is an area in which reception is all but impossible. Known as the "skip distance", this area is virtually dead space as far as your communications are concerned.

The clarity of your signal will depend on a number of factors, again almost all of them out of your control.

Natural phenomena such as sun spots have a marked effect on HF radio signals. There is nothing you can do about these spots. The frequency assigned to you might work well at one time of the day and then be virtually useless at another. It might be better by day than by night, but again this is largely out of your control. Sometimes you will be told to use different frequencies at different times of the day to overcome these problems. If you have a mechanism on your HF set with which to *tune* your antenna, always do so. Ask how this should be done. This operation matches your set to the aerial and will give you much better communication. When the antenna is not tuned, you cannot communicate, the reason being that the transmitter is virtually disabled, and reception is virtually impossible.




HF sets can be frustrating because of the above-mentioned problems. You should not worry too much because, as we have said, the problems are largely out of your control. "Try, try, and try again!" is the best advice I can give you. If you cannot get through, use other fixed or mobile radio stations, which can relay your message.

## SATELLITE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS

SATCOMs are simple to use. They work by bouncing their signals off a satellite and back down to a ground receiver or a relay station, which can then retransmit. The area on the ground where you can obtain good communications from your SATCOM is known as the ''footprint''. Remember, just because a particular make of SATCOM operated wonderfully on your last mission does not mean it will be ideal in another part of the world. The ''footprint'' might be completely different. So take the advice of your communications experts when they are issuing your equipment. They know what will work and what you require.

The most important feature of the SATCOM is guaranteed long-range communication. However, for short-range work the VHF sets are still the most economical and useful option. In addition, you need to be aware that with the increasing use of satellite phones in troubled regions, simultaneous communications can overload the capacity of the satellite channels. Therefore, satellite communication should not be considered as a complete security network unto itself, but rather as a supplement to the HF and VHF networks.

The modern SATCOM sometimes incorporates an automatically transmitted GPS (global positioning system). In other words, anyone monitoring your transmission will be able to establish your exact geographical position. Be aware that this capability could pose a security risk for you. The parties you deal with may accuse you of revealing details of *their* location. In areas where such sensitivities exist, the SATCOM might better be left back at your base.

Remember, with the SATCOM, only point-to-point communication is possible – you cannot transmit to a number of receivers simultaneously.

## MOBILE PHONES

Mobile phones are now most humanitarian volunteers' favourite way of communicating. There are very good reasons for this: they are simple to use and you can get through without the problems associated with VHF and HF. With GSM (global system for mobile communications) systems, you can obtain broad international coverage for your mobile. Access to e-mail through your phone is another attraction.

Despite all the good points, the use of mobile phones presents certain disadvantages. Costs in some regions can be high, especially for international calls. The coverage might be good in some areas, particularly in cities, and poor or non-existent in the countryside. You might have to purchase a new SIM card or phone for use in some countries if your system is not compatible with local ones.

In addition, there are a number of security-related aspects that you should take into account:

- In a disaster-hit or war-torn area, the mobile phone network might have been destroyed or damaged. In this case, no mobile phone communication will be available or, at best, it will be unreliable.
- In times of crisis, a mobile phone system might well become overloaded with too many users and it might be impossible to make calls.
- The local authorities can control the mobile phone system. They might decide to turn it off.

- The local authorities can listen in to any conversation. (As with all other forms of communication you are likely to use, mobile phone conversations should always be regarded as insecure.)
- The phones themselves are attractive items for a thief.
- The new and attractive selling points of mobile phones (the camera and video-recording capabilities) could get you into trouble. As mentioned in the section on cameras, the mere presence of these built-in features could cause your intentions to be misunderstood. Their presence could be deliberately used against you. Essentially, we are talking about potential spying gadgets. Avoid this by using simple mobile phones without the new ''gismos''.
- When you speak on a VHF radio net, all your colleagues within range can hear what you are saying. This is called an ''all-informed radio net''. However, when you speak on a mobile phone, it is normally a simple one-to-one conversation. As you can imagine, this might also have security implications (e.g. if there has been an incident and you are trying to inform others or tell them of an area to avoid).

## THE INTERNET AND COMPUTERS

These days we all use the internet and other computer networks to communicate with friends or indeed with our organizations. All of us know the advantages of the system. From a security point of view, I wish only to highlight the following dangers in its use:

- Like all the systems mentioned above, it is not secure.
- Beware of using the internet to communicate directly with your organization on operational matters from home. You might inadvertently be cutting across or short-circuiting the chain of command, and that could have security implications. Better to work through the accepted chain so that all are aware of what is going on.
- Your computer is vulnerable to unscrupulous thieves. They might simply steal it. But they might be more sophisticated: when you are not around, they could easily download vast amounts of information in almost no time by plugging in a small USB key (these things now have a huge capacity). Lock your room or lock your portable computer away when you are

not using it. If you use a USB key to back up your hard disc, give it the same security attention as the hard disc.

## THE PHONETIC ALPHABET

The phonetic alphabet is a generally accepted way of conveying important information when transmission conditions are difficult or if you have to spell a difficult place name or person's name. By all means use your own versions of the alphabet if you wish – it can be very amusing for others and probably does no harm *as long as all those involved understand it*. However, if you want to use the standard version, here it is:

A: Alpha
B: Bravo
C: Charlie
D: Delta
E: Echo
F: Foxtrot
G: Golf
H: Hotel
I: India
J: Juliet
K: Kilo
L: Lima
M: Mike
N: November
O: Oscar
P: Papa
Q: Quebec
R: Romeo
S: Sierra
T: Tango
U: Uniform
V: Victor
W: Whiskey
X: X-Ray
Y: Yankee
Z: Zulu

# NOTES

# NOTES

# NOTES

# NOTES

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

STAYING ALIVE offers expert advice on security to humanitarian volunteers operating in conflict zones.

Author David Lloyd Roberts has witnessed conflict from the viewpoint of both a military officer and a humanitarian worker. His book draws on a unique variety of up-to-date experience.

By explaining the different threats to your safety, this book lays to rest some of the mystique surrounding the subject of field security.

Yes, there are dangers, but with some basic understanding of them they can be avoided or at least substantially reduced. As the old saying goes, “Knowledge dispels fear.”

You are ultimately the guardian of your own safety and security. The knowledge provided by this book puts you in a better position to draw that critical line between the calculated and the unacceptable risk, a line that you, and those in your charge, must never cross.

ICRC

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