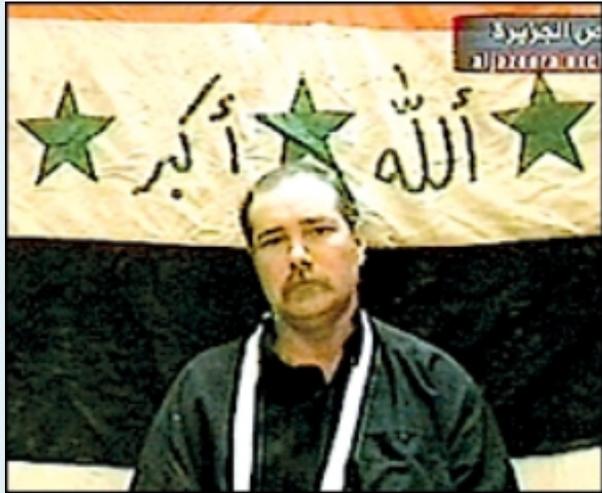


THOMAS HAMILL

Situation: US Contractor Thomas Hamill Survives Captivity in Iraq.

On 9 April, 2004, Iraqi insurgents attacked a US convoy near Baghdad Airport and captured a US contractor, Thomas Hamill. The 43-year old Hamill was a dairy farmer from Mississippi who had taken a high paying contractor job in Iraq to improve his financial situation. On the day he was captured, he was serving as the convoy commander on a mission to deliver supplies to US forces.

Hamill maintained his composure through 24 days of intense heat while the insurgents moved him over a hundred miles from the site of his capture. His calm demeanor may have saved him from abuses suffered by other captives in Iraq. On May 2, 2004, he heard a US patrol pass the house he was held captive in and he managed to escape and catch up with the patrol.



Hostage survival requires a mindset that minimizes the possibility of hostile actions by the captors and remains alert to the prospect of escape.



Thomas Hamill sold his dairy cows in Macon, Mississippi and signed up for a year-long stint driving fuel trucks in Iraq to help his family's finances. A scheduling miscommunication on 9 April 2004 sent his convoy toward Baghdad Airport prematurely where it came under hostile fire. An explosion rocked his truck and he received a gunshot wound in his left arm. Insurgents dragged Hamill to an awaiting car to take him captive. In the following days, the insurgents murdered six other contractors and an Army PFC captured in the same ambush.

Hamill was last seen by an Australian news film crew as he was shoved into the car. The insurgents allowed Hamill to state his name to the film crew before they drove away.

Clearly over-powered by the insurgents, he did not struggle and he acted in a compliant manner toward his captors.

The moment of hostage taking is extremely dangerous. Captors are more likely to act on reflex and kill an intended hostage who presents a threat. On the other hand, it is also a moment when a potential hostage might escape due to the confusion of the situation. Your actions in such a situation are a personal choice, and you should consider the specific circumstances of your situation when deciding how to respond.

While in captivity, Hamill noted the different personalities of his guards and he adopted an instinctive captive's etiquette, showing neither fear nor disrespect toward his captors. He refused to beg or plead for anything, and he tried not to show the pain he felt from his gunshot wound. One belligerent guard screamed threats to hang him from a bridge, but Hamill maintained a calm demeanor and avoided eye contact with aggressive captors. Others seemed sympathetic and conversed with him and watched while he self-administered his anti-seizure medication by injection.



Hamill's captors made him read a statement for a video camera, demanding the US end the siege of Fallujah or he would die. At the conclusion, Hamill added, "God Bless." His captors were angry at this ad lib and spent hours trying to delete the religious statement from the tape.

To minimize dehydration in the stifling heat, he drank only water and sat quietly. He tried to not offend the guards, expressing gratitude for food, water, and Pepsi they offered, even though he found the food distasteful. He pretended to drink the Pepsi, while in fact he only drank water, because he knew that caffeine as a diuretic would cause dehydration.

Calmness, dignity, and a lack of hostility in a hostage might discourage personal abuses by guards. Surviving as a hostage is a test of will, but it is best not to let it become a contest of wills directed against the captors. In addition, during long periods of captivity, you should maintain your own personal values and avoid becoming sympathetic to the positions of your captors.



During his captivity, Hamill chose not to act on chances to escape or resist. Once, an insurgent guard left a gun in his room, but he chose not to seize it. He reasoned he had gone to Iraq to support his family, not to take a life. On another occasion, he was taken outside to relieve himself and he considered running away in the dark. Another time he managed to escape his lightly guarded cell and unsuccessfully tried to wave down a passing US helicopter. In both cases, he decided not to run

because he had no idea where he was or which way to go. He returned to his cell.

On May 2, 2004, Hamill heard vehicles passing that he believed was a US patrol. He forced the cell door open and ran a half mile to catch up to them. At 11:15 AM a patrol from the 2-108th Infantry, NY National Guard saw a scruffy looking man approaching, yelling in English and waving his shirt. They found him in Balad, a town 100 miles from where he was seized 24 days earlier. It is believed Hamill had been passed between various insurgent factions. A hasty cordon and search of the area led to the detainment of two Iraqi citizens with one AK-47 rifle.

Thomas Hamill provided many valuable lessons in his hostage experience. These include keeping a level head, maintaining physical and mental well-being, and developing an appropriate relationship with his captors.