

BIAP 4.20.2005

The Ambush of Edinburgh Risk and Security Management's Operation Apollo

Prepared: April 22nd, 2005 by James Yeager

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Orders were at 1100hrs Baghdad local time (+9 CST) on April 20th, 2005. We had our typical set of orders covering the aspects of the trip. We have heard them so many times we can all most likely recite them while asleep. Team leaders Al "Johnno" Johnson and Stef Surette gave the mission briefing. We were going to Baghdad International Airport (aka BIAP) to pick up two ERSM employees, one of which was an Operation Apollo team member.

Vehicle One: Black unarmored BMW manual transmission

Driver: James Yeager, Primary weapon Bushmaster semi-auto AR-15 with 11.5" barrel

Vehicle Commander and Medic: Stef Surette, Primary weapon 7" barrel full auto AR

Rear Gunner and Medic: Mark Collen, Primary FN M-249 secondary Bushmaster M-4

Vehicle Two: Black armored Mercedes automatic transmission

Driver: Simon Merry, Primary MP-5 secondary Bushmaster M-4

Vehicle Commander: Ian Harris Primary Bushmaster M-4

Vehicle Three: White unarmored BMW automatic transmission

Driver: Chris Ahmelman MP-5 and M-4

Mission Commander and lead medic: Al Johnson Mission Commander, MP-5 and M-4

Rear Gunner: James Hunt II, Primary RPK, Secondary FN M-249, and Tertiary an M-4

All carried Glock model 19s as a sidearm.

We followed our written S.O.P. in relation to dress which is a locally procured ankle length shirt (also known as a "man dress") that had been cut off at the waist to make me look like an Iraqi while seated in a car. Everyone wore something like that and/or a Shemag (the "rags" locals wear on their heads that gets them the "rag head" moniker).

The mission began at approximately 1125hrs. We departed the Green Zone (also known as the International Zone) checkpoint 12 like we do every time unless it is closed then we take our singular alternate route out the July 14th Bridge. The short trip flowed smoothly until we were within approximately ½ mile of the relative safety of Camp Victory and BIAP.

We got stopped in traffic at Rally Point #4 which is the final overpass between BIAP and the Green Zone. The U.S. Army had stopped traffic because they were at the scene of an I.E.D. (Improvised Explosives Device) that had severely damaged a Sport Utility Vehicle. "BIAP Road" is a divided highway with a median strip. It is also a limited access road like an American Interstate which uses entry and exit ramps for access. There was an impromptu stop sign in the middle of our two lane road and orange cones letting traffic know to stay well back.

There was also 2-3 Humvees with at least one of them pointing a .50 caliber heavy machine gun, which I knew would go through an armored car, in our direction to make sure no vehicles got close. Since we had made a conscious decision to drive cars that looked like the locals and dress like the locals I hesitated to get closer than 200-300 yards. There have been more incidents of the Military shooting at PSDs than terrorists which is completely understandable because as a group we tend to drive aggressively, try to blend in with local vehicles, dress like locals and carry weapons often times in plain view if not sticking out of the windows.

I had moved my rifle from the console to my lap when we stopped. Our cars were about 25 yards apart. I watched my "Area of Responsibility". As the driver of vehicle one I had to watch from my seat's 12 o'clock counter clockwise around to 8 o'clock. Jay Hunt, who was the rear gunner in vehicle three, had the largest area to watch from the vehicle's 9 o'clock around to the 3 o'clock.

While we sat in traffic our Team Leader (One I.C.) and lead Medic "Johno" fired multiple bursts from his MP-5 submachine gun from vehicle three. He got outside the car to do it at least once. My estimation is 3-4 bursts of 3-4 rounds each. He did this to "warn them off" (cars) in the rear because they were getting too close. Johno's area of responsibility was not the rear. The rear was Jay's responsibility. Johno was neglecting his 12 o'clock to 3 o'clock position. Each time he fired his weapon he was drawing unwanted attention our way and not watching his side of the car. His side of the car is the one in which our attack came from minutes later.

After his second burst I removed my "Haji dress" because there was nothing between those U.S. Army .50 caliber heavy machine guns and us and I didn't want them to look down the road at the gunfire and see all of us wearing local clothing to include Shemags and engage us. Besides my fear of being shot by the U.S. Military, after Johno began shooting, I assumed the cars near us knew we were Contractors anyway. Our "cover" if we ever had one was now non-existent.

After being directly under the overpass for several moments (maybe 10) we pulled forward about 100 meters to where the final on-ramp to BIAP Road entered. I pulled my number one vehicle far right, as instructed by my team leader Stef, to block traffic from coming onto the roadway. After about 10-15 minutes I took the car out of gear and pulled on the emergency break because my calf was beginning to ache. I would end up regretting that decision.

To our right was a “frontage” road or “slip” road about 75-100 yards out that ran parallel to BIAP Road. There were houses just on the other side of that road. After a few moments one of the guys (I think commander of vehicle two: Ian Harris) spotted a small white sedan on the slip road. He asked that someone look at it with binoculars. We didn’t have any but Mark had a telescopic sight on his rifle. He stated it was parked and the sole occupant was talking on the phone, wasn’t paying attention to us, and wasn’t a threat. I said aloud “He is a fucking Dicker.” (Dicker is what the Brits call a “lookout”.) My car commander Stef, who heard me, never acknowledged.

About three to five minutes after we saw the Dicker (approximately 1350 hrs) I heard another volley of fire and I thought to myself “What the fuck is Johnno shooting at NOW?!” I felt rounds hitting the car and I heard the distinctive supersonic crack of a round pass through our car, inches in front of my face, from right to left missing Stef and I. Stef yelled “I’m hit!” and he began emptying a 30 round mag out his window.

I need to mention at this point that both of the other guys in my car saw a large white SUV with black tinted windows rolling slowly down the frontage road heading the same direction we were pointing. They apparently drove a short distance and whipped into an intersection, did a u-turn, and stopped momentarily pointing their vehicle in our direction. This event took several minutes. Mark later said that the passenger window was down in the SUV but he could not see inside and he kept looking in other directions because he didn’t consider the vehicle to be a threat. There were two other people with the area of responsibility in which the attack came from in vehicles two and three and NOBODY reported ANYTHING.

After I went through my O.O.D.A. Loop (please search Google for OODA Loop and Col. John Boyd for more info) I punched the gas to the floor and the engine raced but the car wouldn’t move. I thought it had it been knocked out of commission. After what seemed like an eternity, but was a couple of seconds, I grabbed the door handle and began implementation of our ambush S.O.P. for a disabled car in which the first step is getting out of the car. I remembered I was in a stick shift that was in neutral with the emergency brake on as I hit the ground, and the point of no return, and moved to the rear wheel. I not sure how long it takes to empty a 30 round magazine on full auto but I began firing before Stef emptied his gun the first time.

As I shot from the rear of the car I wanted to kill the terrorists but nobody had told me the direction (I figured that one out on my own), description, or distance. I fired because I have been trained to fire when someone is shooting at me. If I couldn’t make hits I was sure going to make noise. Half the distance to the slip road there were some Hesco barriers and dirt was flying off the top of them. I thought maybe Stef had seen someone behind them and was shooting at them. I now realize it was merely rounds from our team being shot without using the sights. At the time I didn’t know and because there were houses directly beyond that it was the safest place for me to shoot. I shot about 6-10 aimed rounds into the barriers utilizing my EOTech weapon sight.

I felt Mark coming out of the rear door so I began the next phase of our S.O.P. which is getting away from the car (getting off the “X”) because people tend to shoot at cars and rifles easily penetrate them. I turned and ran toward the median which was about 40 feet to the edge. I got face down on the edge of the asphalt, took a firing position, and yelled “MOVE!” to Mark.

I am sure Mark had trouble hearing me as he fired the M-249 across the back of vehicle one. I pulled my rifle to my cheek, looked through my EOTech again, scanned the roof tops and almost shot some clothes hanging off a TV antenna to dry. Nobody was there. I scanned the windows of the houses. I KNEW I heard a PKM and I KNEW the PKM was hitting us well and was most likely in a static position. I scanned the Hescos again. Nothing. “Where the fuck is it?” I wondered as I searched. I began aiming between the windows of the houses and shooting the solid brick walls. Although I didn’t know who I needed to kill I knew they were that direction “somewhere”. I felt useless but I thought I might be able to keep their heads down. Mark’s 249 went down (broken or bent belt) and I fired while he grabbed his M-4.

“SHIT!” I thought to myself. I had forgotten to deploy a smoke grenade. When Mark resumed firing I ripped it out of the pouch, peeled off the 100mph tape, put the spoon in the palm of my hand, straightened the ends of the pin out, and pulled the ring. I kept thinking about my Instructor course for and teaching the proper deployment of flashbangs, smoke, and CS. My mind was racing. I forced myself to focus. I wanted to obscure Mark and Stef and so I heaved the high concentration smoke as hard as I could and managed to get it on the far side of their car.

While this was happening I heard sporadic outgoing gunfire from cars two and three, I wasn’t sure which vehicles but I was glad to hear them shooting because I knew they were alive. I was hoping that cars two and three were communicating and covering each other. Mark and I were filling in each others gaps of fire.

I thought my magazine was nearing empty and while Mark was firing I took the time to do a tactical reload on my rifle and get my bearing. I looked to my rear and the opposite side of the road and it was all clear. I looked on the overpass and it was all clear. I looked at car number three and I saw Jay Hunt with blood all over his crotch. I heard him tell Johno “I’m hit in the femoral buddy.” very calmly. He slid himself toward the front of the car so that Johno could apply first aid from behind the engine which was the safest spot. I looked at Chris. He was still in the driver’s seat slumped lifelessly to the left against the door.

I checked car two, the armored Mercedes, Simon and Ian were uninjured and now in the fight. I was glad to see them. Although Simon got out with an MP-5 and he quickly discarded it with for an M-4. I was glad to see that as well. I looked at car one and saw Stef was out of the car but he was going down. Although I knew he told me he was hit he had still been in the fight and got out of the car under his own power. I did not realize the extent of his injuries.

I began speaking to Simon who was the closest to me. The next phase of our S.O.P. was, if the cars were down, to commandeer a vehicle from the opposite side of the road, load the dead and wounded, and escape. I asked Simon, who was the closest to me, if he wanted to help me get a couple of cars. He was drawn back into the chaos in front of him and never responded. I yelled “WHO ARE WE SHOOTING AT!?!” as loud as I could to nobody in particular and got no reply.

Ian and Simon were now communicating with Mark. Mark has asked them to move the armored car, vehicle two, up for cover so he can attend to Stef’s injuries. Ian at some point here ran to vehicle one and began covering Mark. Simon tried to move vehicle two but it barely limped forward. It was not moved into a position to cover Mark and Stef. Simon got out and moved up to vehicle one and provided cover for Mark. Since I was not actively shooting at the terrorists I was still searching the areas the guys are NOT shooting at so we have full 360 degree security.

I now know that Mark has assistance and if Simon and Ian cannot help him that there is certainly nothing I can do for him. I shift my attention to Johnno who is alone at vehicle three. He is now working on Jay’s injuries frantically and calling for help. I run to him. When I get there I can tell Johnno is trying to cover his 360 and work on Jay at the same time. Jay was still breathing but his respirations were becoming labored. I reassured Johnno that I had him protected as I scanned the area. After a few moments a car drove toward us from the rear. I waive them off but they do not stop. I fired twice and they stopped.

Johnno tells me he is out of bandages. I motion toward my medical pouch and he grabs one of mine. He didn’t realize it, and I didn’t think to tell him, but I had a packet of TraumaDEX in the pouch as well. I could hear the Humvees driving up from the BIAP end of the road (the direction we were traveling) and the Soldiers talking to the others. I was relieved to finally know we had help. Johnno and the medic asked for help removing Jay’s Paraclete Releasable Assault Vest. I reach over and yank the ripcord off and the vest fell off allowing the ready access.

Almost simultaneously I see a man walking toward us from the opposite direction. He is white and dressed like a PSD operator although he was wearing no armor and carried no weapon. I find out later he works for U.K. based Olive Security. I yell to him “DO YOU HAVE ANY BANDAGES!?!” he holds up his finger in a “wait a minute” fashion as he strolls my way. I yell louder “DO YOU HAVE ANY BANDAGES!?!” He replies with what I think was an Australian accent “Can we drive through?” I was stunned, simply stunned, that he had the NERVE to ask to drive through. He was within 20 feet now and I said “DO YOU HAVE ANY FUCKING BANDAGES!?!” He ignored me and walked past to one of the just arriving U.S. Soldiers and asked if he could drive through.

The Soldier asked “Do you have an SUV?” The man replied “Yes. Can I drive through?” The Soldier said “Get your SUV up here and put that body in it. (Pointing to Chris)” He replied “But we are in a terrible hurry!” The Soldier said “Do it now.” In a much more pleasant tone than I thought the man deserved. The man began to protest and the Soldier clearly, firmly, and loudly stated “DO YOU HAVE A D.O.D. CARD?!” The man replied “Yes.” The Soldier said “THEN I AM YOUR ON SCENE COMMANDER AND I ORDER YOU TO GET YOUR S.U.V. UP HERE AND LOAD UP THAT BODY...NOW!!!!” He finally complied and meandered back toward his truck obviously put off.

The soldier told me to get Chris’ body from the driver’s seat. Johno and a military medic worked on Jay as I opened the door and caught Chris. He had begun to fall out. It happened very quickly from here but the car, which was an automatic, was still in gear and when I pulled Chris out the car began rolling away toward Jay. If Johno had not reacted quickly Jay would have been crushed by the car. I had to drop Chris’ body and run around the opposite side of the car to get inside. Luckily a soldier on the other side was able to get in and switch it off before it crashed into a Humvee that was backing up to avoid the collision.

Jay and Stef were attended to by military medics and were rushed to the closest medical facility at Camp Victory. Johno and the Olive PSD team loaded Chris’ body in the back of their SUV and followed. The 4 uninjured survivors (Ian, Simon, Mark, and I) got into all three vehicles and drove toward the Camp Victory entrance as commanded by the Military. The armored Mercedes sustained enough damage from the gunfire that it could not move the few hundred yards to the checkpoint. We abandoned it on the roadside.

Other Details

Everyone that was wounded was wounded by the initial volley of gunfire. Stef and Jay both received wounds to their pelvic / upper thigh region that severed their femoral arteries upon the initial contact. Even though they were injured they stayed in the fight. I am unable to assess how many rounds Jay actually fired but it was several. Stef emptied a 30 round magazine (loaded with 28) and reloaded and fired an unknown number of rounds from the second magazine.

I never knew during the firefight which vehicle (or house, or person, etc) was shooting at us and I was the first one in position to deliver accurate, sustained, and deadly return fire and I didn’t know where to aim my gun. I received no serious injuries.

Mark fired with the FN M-249 until it stopped functioning. He estimates he got 60-80 rounds through it first. He switched to his M-4 and fired as well. I am not sure if he ever reloaded the M-4. He received no serious injuries.

Simon was the driver of car number 2 I feel as if he should have been watching the same areas as me and therefore never would have seen the SUV and might not have been told either. He had an MP-5 in his lap but he switched to an M-4 shortly after the gunfire erupted. He never had a target and never fired. He received no serious injuries. Ian never had to reload his M-4. He received no serious injuries.

Johno emptied a full magazine in his MP-5 and reloaded one time. He was shot through his left buttock and was still providing Jay with care. Johno and I expended all our bandages on our person and from his back pack trauma kit just caring for Jay. Later the doctors at the medical center would say that Mark and Johno did an outstanding job.

Johno was the mission Commander, Ian was second in command, and Stef was third. Nobody was giving any clear commands so in the end I just filled in gaps to the tactical jigsaw puzzle the best I could.

Chris was wounded through the leg first and instead of moving off the "X" he spent the last seconds of his life telling Johno about it while he took another round through his throat and one through his head.

We had two unarmored cars and one armored car. All injuries came from within the unarmored cars. Both of the unarmored cars, while hit multiple times, were never disabled. Although the rounds that impacted the passenger compartment of the armored car did not penetrate, the transmission/engine was destroyed as well as the fuel tank being ruptured.

As soon as our group started shooting the terrorists became disinterested in staying in the fight which is their modus operandi.

There was never a point during the incident where I was affected by any of the mental affects of adrenaline like auditory exclusion or tunnel vision. The reason I point this out is because apparently Olive Security told our team they fired at the SUV. Not only do I not remember seeing or hearing it happening you cannot hear their "7.62" on our video.

I had the least amount of time in the Middle East of anyone on that mission. I have no time in the military; I was a 12 year Cop. My bio is on my website for anyone who wants to read it www.TacticalResponse.com

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" -John 15:13

There is an AAR separate from this document.