



HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU: Surveillance Tips From a Special Forces Operator

By: Michael Reddington, CFI

As with most things in life, the most special part of traveling is the people we meet. My personal and professional lives have been drastically impacted by conversations I've had with exceptional people who I never would've otherwise met. A recent example is a conversation I had with a former Special Forces operator; we will call him "Joe." Joe and I spoke at the same training event and ended our evening together with a small group at the pub next to our hotel.

During our conversation we discovered we had several things in common, including a professional requirement to gather intelligence by following people around without being seen. Admittedly, I'm pretty sure I never surveilled an individual who was a threat to global security. However, we both have conducted surveillances that could've ended "badly", in relation to our own worlds, if we were discovered. Whether he realized it or not Joe provided the group with several bits of wisdom and one particular answer he gave us caused me to ask him if he would be willing to do an interview and Joe graciously agreed.

Of course we do have a few disclaimers. Given the nature of Joe's experience there were questions he couldn't answer and details he couldn't provide. You'll see that in one of his answers he references using UAV's to assist with surveillance and our official statement on using drones during your surveillance operations is as follows: *Always confirm and comply with your company policy before, during and after any surveillances you conduct.* Every answer may not fit directly into your field of operations, but there are plenty of thoughts and lessons that apply to everything we do.

**Always confirm and comply
with your company policy
before, during and after any
surveillances you conduct.**

Joe thank you for taking the time to speak with us. To get started what are the most important things you look for when you are studying your target?

If you're focusing just on your target it will be important to pick up any mannerisms such as the way he walks or any other behavioral traits. This will allow you, as an operator, to confirm your target if he changes his appearance such as hair or clothing. It is a lot harder for a target to change the way he walks opposed to his hairstyle. Identifying clothing can be important if you are following an unaware target. Some targets will have a favorite jacket for example, but this should never be the driving factor when confirming targets.

How important is it to fit into your surrounding environment?

This is probably the most important part of being a surveillance operator. Not fitting in with the surroundings will highlight you to everyone else in that environment. If you take any major city in the world, the local population will be able to tell who the tourists are. Same deal with surveillance. Now saying that, using being a tourist as cover will work for a limited time. However, you can only get away with it once and you won't be able to put sustained surveillance on a target.

Environmental training should be part of any surveillance operator's course. This way students can understand what they will need to do to prepare themselves to work in multiple environments. A thorough environment appreciation should be conducted before surveillance operations are carried out based on

Continued on page 5

what currency is used, places to avoid or be aware of, and local customs that involve large groups of people coming together for a common cause. A very good example of a lack of environmental awareness leading to tragedy is the case of Corporal Howes and Corporal Woods in Northern Ireland in 1988. Corporals Howes and Woods were off duty soldiers serving in Northern Ireland and through lack of awareness, or a failure to receive information, drove their car into an IRA (Catholic Terrorist Organization) funeral procession. As with most processions in Northern Ireland at that time the crowd was very aware and emotions were running high due to the violent situation in the country. This procession was particularly heightened because the deceased IRA member had been killed by British Security Forces. This was also the second attempt to bury the deceased man as many people were injured when his first funeral procession had been attacked by an Ulster Loyalist (Protestant Terrorist Organization) member. When the Corporals car sped into the funeral procession the crowd first believed they were being attacked again by the Ulster Loyalist and then discovered the occupants were off duty soldiers. The crowd's reaction proved fatal for both Corporal Howes and Corporal Woods. This situation could have been avoided if the Corporals knew the area, population and the situation better. For the record they were not surveillance operators.

How dangerous is it to completely mirror what your target does?

This will be dangerous if the target has a team doing counter surveillance or if you work in an area where the local population is very aware of surveillance operations. If the target is surveillance weary he may have a routine to try and identify anyone following him. This could be as simple as driving around the block and seeing which car follows him through three or four corners.

If the target is surveillance weary he may have a routine to try and identify anyone following him.

One key is to follow the pattern of life that you have built up over time of following the suspects.

What special considerations do you take when you have to follow a target into, and out of, multiple locations?

One of the first considerations is how many times you have been seen, or could have been seen that day. If you think you've been seen then you should err on the side of caution. You could blow the whole surveillance operation if you are not honest with yourself. You also need to define what multiple locations means within your operation. Being seen in several different shops in the same mall

or town is probably ok if there is an air gap between each one. However, being seen in two different remote locations is a different matter. By that I mean if you see X in town Y and drive four hours to town Z and see X again, that would be suspect.

What clues do you look for to anticipate your targets next move?

One key is to follow the pattern of life that you have built up over time of following the suspect. This would allow you to place operators at specific locations in advance as the target does not really suspect people who are already at locations before he arrives. Also, if you are conducting close up surveillance simple techniques like listening to phone calls, looking over his shoulder when

he is on the Internet or writing in a diary, and listening to any conversations he has with other targets can all provide important clues.

See which are the most critical components of your preparation before conducting a surveillance turn to page 11.

Continued on page 11



LINKS of INTEREST

This podcast is a conversation with Dr. James Mitchell on WCBM Radio. As an interrogator he was very involved in the Enhanced Interrogation Techniques. He discusses “myths” about the use, and the “myths” of what he calls “softer techniques.” I would personally be curious of our CFIs responses after listening to this 14 minute piece. Email Wayne at whoover@w-z.com with comments. Link: <http://www.wcbm.com/2016/12/12/sf-interview-dr-james-mitchell-co-author-of-enhanced-interrogation-inside-the-minds-motives/>

Here's Looking at You: Surveillance Tips From a Special Forces Operator cont'd



By: Michael Reddington, CFI

What are the most critical components of your preparation before conducting a surveillance?

The first critical component is a fully prepared team that has either all done the same training course or has worked together for a good period of time. If possible, the team should have varying degrees of experiences in the areas they work. This will allow the newer members of the team to learn from the more experienced operators. This is more critical when you have a very surveillance aware target so you avoid mirroring the target.

As a matter of course, a good ground and target study should be carried out by a team member or members who report back to the whole team. This way the team isn't just listening to a brief from someone else. The team also has to be well practiced in all surveillance drills so that the whole team acts naturally when things don't go to plan - which is guaranteed to happen. Additionally, the team needs to understand what they have to do should a team member get into trouble so they can act quickly.

Be confident in your abilities and trust your instinct.

If you could give one piece of advice to someone conducting his first surveillance, what would it be?

Try and relax as much as possible. You will feel like the whole world is watching. This is where experienced operators come in. Whenever possible, an experienced operator should be in a position to support a new member during his first follow. This will allow the new member to relax knowing support is close by. Other than that just be confident in your abilities and trust your instinct. If it can be arranged, new members should be put on less aware targets and in easier environments for their first assignments so they can develop confidence.

If you realize your cover has been blown, how do you recommend calmly and safely removing yourself from the situation?

As stated in the question, the most important point is realizing your cover has been blown. Most incidents occur when the operator fails to realize this or tries to push through it. The first thing is to report this to the rest of the team or control unit and try and give a detailed description of where you are and what your plan is so the team can move in to assist if necessary. What happens after that is based on what type of compromise you have had, hard or soft. A hard compromise is where there is an immediate danger to your life and you need support now. In

The most important point is realizing your cover has been blown.

this situation, the team should drop everything and make you the priority. A soft compromise is where you are not in danger but you know the target has seen you. In this situation the team could keep going with the operation, but consideration should be given to the fact the target will be very aware which could lead to a hard compromise. The above two situations will also be dictated by who your target is and what his modus operandi is. In both circumstances, honesty from the operator is key.

Are there ways people can practice surveillance skills outside of work without getting the police called?

It is possible but you have to be aware of what you are going to do if you are seen and the police do get involved. It may not go down too well, in this day and age, with the terrorist threat. You need to determine if you are going to train as an individual or as a team. For both, the best places to train on foot surveillance are shopping malls.

For team training, get one person to play the target and have the team follow him around the shopping mall. The team must have a covert communication system or use cell phones. The target then just needs to walk round the mall, going in and out of shops and conducting day to day business. Malls are fast moving because shops are in close proximity. They can also get crowded with people so a team can lose a target if it does not place itself correctly quickly.

For individual training, just pick random targets and see how long you can follow one, but don't go for more than one or two shops. This is good training to see how long you can comfortably stay behind someone, say in a shopping aisle. This will highlight how fast you can blend in with your surroundings as the target will have gone in there with purpose to buy or look at something and you have not. You will also have to deal with very friendly shop assistants asking you if you need any help - especially in the US! One example of how this can lead operators to become fixated on the target and not aware of their surroundings is when a male operator followed a target into a shop and picked a position to observe the target from. It wasn't until he was asked if he needed help that he realized he was standing in the women's underwear section. If that ever happens make sure you have female sizes in your head so you can say you're buying underwear for someone!

Continued on page 12

If you are required to conduct surveillance in an area where you can't easily blend in, how do you make the best of a bad situation?

This is a common problem and the only way to get around it is to try and cover the exits and entrances of the location. This is common in estates or hard neighborhoods. The team should sit on the outside and look for the target on the approach roads. This is where a good understanding of the target and the target's associates come in to play. As an example the target may not use his car. The best way to get around this challenge is with aerial assets. UAV's are common now and used by Paparazzi really well. You could follow their lead.

...a good understanding of the target and the target's associates come in to play.

Can you share a few surveillance mistakes you have seen so we can learn from them?

Mistakes usually occur from lack of honesty or not owning up to a mistake. I have called out the wrong direction many times, but I was always quick to admit my mistake as soon as I realized what I had done. As soon as the team knows a mistake has been made they can start correcting it. Everyone makes mistakes so they can be forgiven. However, if someone doesn't own up to his/her mistake it can be bad for the team, become a danger to team unity and cause friction. I was once part of a team that was in the middle of a surveillance operation that had went on for 17 hours. We had one hour of sleep and had to eat on the move. There were only five of us for the most of the job and we were all tuned into the target. Towards what turned out to be the end of the job we got reinforced with additional operators. At this time the target went into an area like what was mentioned in previous questions, so we covered the way out of the area and waited. The whole team and the control desk were under the assumption that all friendly call signs were accounted for and away from the target. Suddenly one of the call signs calls us and says the target had tried to run him off the road. This sparked the team to kick into action to potentially take down the target (this team was not a direct action force, so there was risk with this as well). The control desk then started tasking call signs to the last position of the call sign who called in the issue. When the area was checked, he and his car were nowhere to be seen. At the same time he called in and reported what had happened and that he was safe. The whole job was called off at that stage. During the debrief we learned the call sign in question, who was new to the team, had decided to drive into the area for a look without telling anyone and he didn't realize the target was watching the road for unusual activity. Not only did the new team member drive slowly down the road looking at properties but he turned around and drove back the same way, at which time the target challenged him. The call sign panicked and the target confirmed he was a surveillance operator and got out of there.

Can you share a few genius decisions that were made during surveillances that we can learn from?

I was working with another government agency with a non-military surveillance team. On one operation I said I would confirm a target in a shopping centre carpark, only to be told not to go and the team leader sent a women to do it. At the time I thought that he may not trust me. Later I was told to go and do a foot surveillance in a hard estate on my own. When I got back for the debrief the team leader told me that he didn't want me getting seen on something soft like walking over a carpark when he had women who would blend in better. He wanted to use me in an area where, if something did go wrong, I could probably get out of it due to my background. The point of this story is know your team's strengths and weaknesses.

Communicating with teammates can be critical and difficult during surveillances. Do you have any advice for communicating quickly and clearly when it counts most?

Surveillance communications need to be short and sharp. The key information the team needs to know is who is following, where the target is, and where the target is going. That should come from the operator who "has" the target. This operator will want to hear who is in immediate support to take the target when he wants to drop it. Some teams use repeat nets to ensure the communications get out. At certain times everyone on the team will have to acknowledge that they are getting this. This does two things, it ensures everyone understands the communication and also lets the team leader/control know that everyone is still safe.

A quick example:

Joe: Target is north on Route 95 from Fredericksburg towards DC.

Mike: In support.

"When I was new I learned who to look towards in stressful situations because if he was ok, we were ok. Then when I became a team leader I had to realize that people were looking at me and I had to be that guy because when I was ok, my team was ok."

Continued on page 13

Joe was very open and welcoming of all the questions he got from the group that night in the pub. I wanted to be very careful and respectful of his service, but I had one question I wanted to ask and his answer inspired me to request the interview. I asked him how he learned to control his adrenaline spikes in stressful situations. His answer was simple and profound. He said, "When I was new I learned who to look towards in stressful situations because if he was ok, we were ok. Then when I became a team leader I had to realize that people were looking at me and I had to be that guy because when I was ok, my team was ok." We are all placed in leadership situations every day with our families, our teams and even in the interview room. When those around us are feeling stressed they will look to us to validate their feelings. If we are flustered, they may fall apart. If we are calm, cool and collected they can control their emotions.

In closing, I want to quickly thank Joe for his time and insights. More importantly, we want to thank Joe and all his team members for everything they have done and sacrificed to keep the rest of us safe.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Reddington, CFI teaches people to use the truth to their advantage. As the Vice President of Executive Education for Wicklander-Zulawski and Associates, he developed the Disciplined Listening Method by integrating key non-confrontational interview and interrogation

techniques with current business best practices to provide executives with advantages at every table at which they sit. To learn more, contact Michael directly at 800-222-7789 x150 or mreddington@w-z.com

If being on the 'No Dispatch' list was this cute... you wouldn't need Iverify.



Iverify™

Click here to learn more about Iverify's Alarm Permit Management solution.