

Behavior of journalists in crisis situations

Analysis of case studies from Ukraine:

Case III: Sky News / near KYIV

The five-member team, fully equipped with vest, helmet and PRESS marking, was in a civilian car, which (probably) did not have a clear press marking. The ambush took place on the bridge of a four-lane road heading towards Kyiv. The road was partially blocked with obstacles and broken-down vehicles and also damaged, so vehicles could only cross the bridge slowly. The team realized it was an attack by the second shot. They stopped their vehicle and evaded the shooter's view by ducking inside the vehicle. Because of the continued fire, the team attempted to identify themselves as journalists. They continued to be fired upon and were also hit. Using visual cover and effective cover, they evaded for about 200 meters and gathered in a factory hall. There they checked each other for wounds and organized a safe return transport, which took place much later under cover of darkness.

<https://news.sky.com/story/sky-news-teams-harrowing-account-of-their-violent-ambush-in-ukraine-this-week-12557585>

Assessment

The attack was carried out at a narrow point (choke point) from a distance of about 500 meters by one machine-gunner. This gunner was very well trained, as can be seen from the fact that he fired only very short bursts at a time and about 50% of his shots also hit the vehicle. The shooter's choice of position on the opposite edge of the forest was very well chosen. The ammunition approach was appropriate to fulfill his intent.

The team's attempts at communication were ineffective because the shooter was out of hearing range and either wore hearing protection himself or could only hear muffled by the sound of the gunfire.

The team was on its way back from a front-line coverage and had even coordinated the routing with Ukrainian forces. Both the location of the attack (out of Ukrainian territory) and the direction (from the direction of Kiev) gave the attacker an element of surprise.

The team reacted quickly and correctly. First, it was made clear to everyone that they were under attack. An immediate check was made to see how everyone was doing and the intention to dodge was communicated. While dodging, initial cover was gathered and a quick body check was performed on the team members that were hit. After reaching a warehouse, a pickup was initiated. What stood out was that items had to be collected (cell phones and press credentials) before exiting the vehicle and that none of the team had a grab bag (more on that later).

Conclusion

The attack was not targeted at journalists (500 meters away and no visible PRESS mark). It was a very well executed (terrorist) attack on civilians, who happened to be journalists here. The team moved out of harm's way quickly and in an exemplary manner. An informed point of contact took care of a safe pickup.

Establishing communication here would only have been possible through visual signals, but would not have been purposeful.

However, the team had no staying power after leaving the vehicle because nothing was carried except what everyone had on them (no water, power banks, food, bandages, backup communications).

Take Home Message

1. communicates as well as this team, that's how they survived.
2. marks the vehicle from all sides as PRESS.
3. no equipment is allowed to (f)lie around in the car, pack everything in a grab bag.

Contents grab bag

This is a backpack, with 20-40 liters of volume. Remove the lap belt, set the shoulder straps to maximum width, so that it can be quickly put on even with a vest. To keep the team's backpacks apart, different markings on the carrying handle of the backpack are recommended. Gloves should be attached to the vest with a carabiner.

The Grab Bag needs three compartments:

Main compartment (largest compartment)

- 2 x 0.5 liters Bottled Water (reserve), additional drinking bottle for use
- About 1,000 kcal of shelf-stable packaged food (power bars, candy bars, etc.)
- If necessary, warm underjacket, cap (in summer mosquito and sun protection and headgear)

Minor subject "Medic" marked with a cross

- 2x life blanket
- 4x disposable gloves
- Medication and bandages

utility compartment (at the top of the backpack, easily accessible)

- Personal equipment
- Journalistic equipment
- Flashlight
- Batteries
- Cell phone (if not on clothes) and charging cable