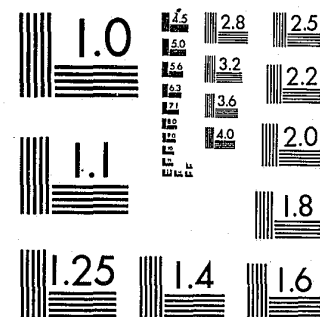


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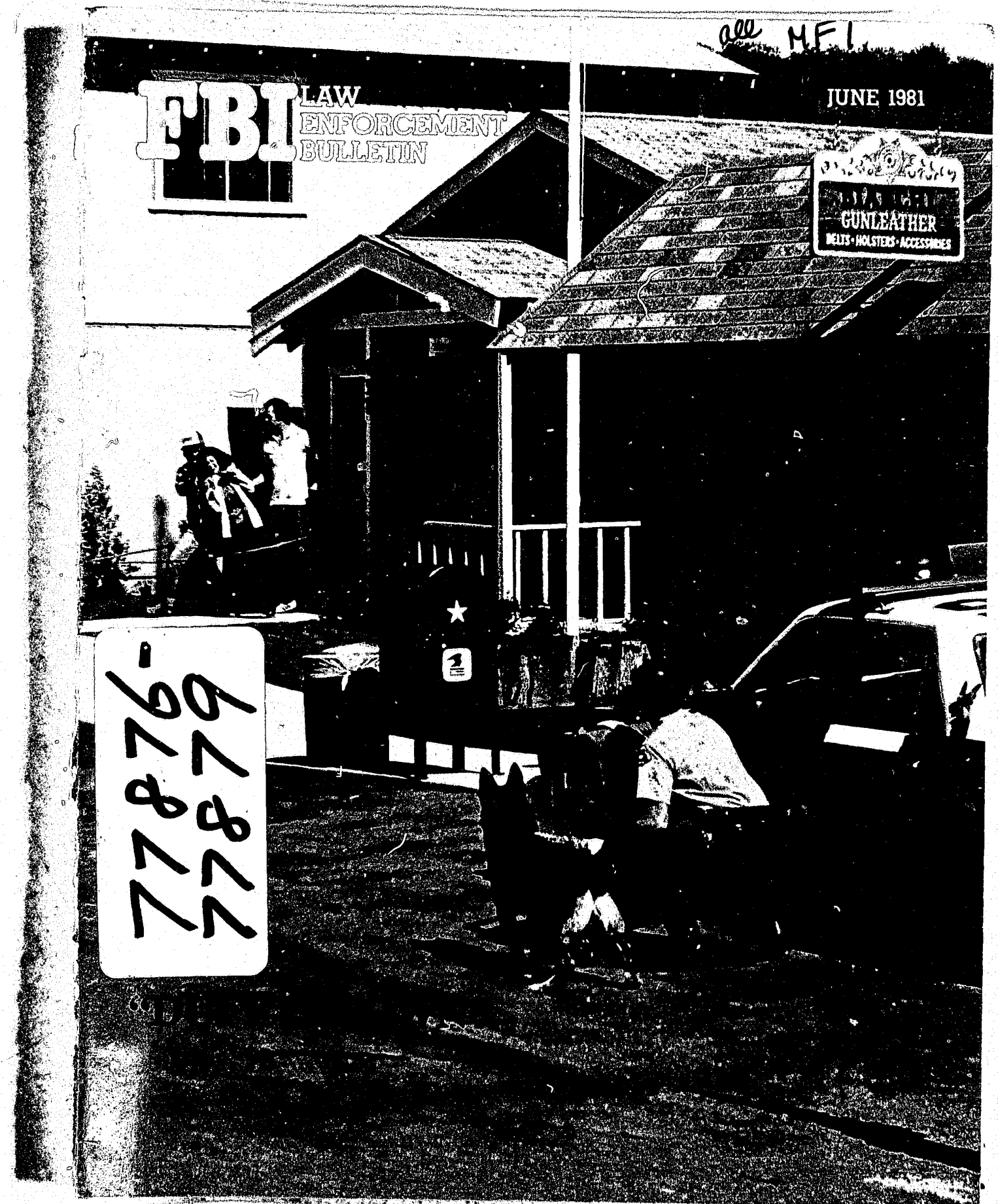
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William H. Webster, Director

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A Practical Overview of Hostage Negotiations (Part I)

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Whenever a barricaded subject or a hostage situation exists, the following responses are available to law enforcement personnel:

- 1) Contain and attempt to negotiate;
- 2) Contain and demand surrender;
- 3) Use of chemical agents to force surrender;
- 4) Use of snipers or sharpshooters to neutralize the subject; or
- 5) Use of a special weapons and tactics assault (SWAT).

If these alternatives are considered, you should always progress from one of the earlier responses to one of the later responses, but it is virtually impossible to return to negotiating, for example, after an assault has taken place. Therefore, the initial response may preclude the use of other responses later on.



Dr. Fuselier

Various aspects of hostage negotiation include:

- 1) What kind of person takes hostages;
- 2) What are common reasons for taking hostages;
- 3) What behavior can be expected from a hostage;
- 4) The process of negotiation;
- 5) Considerations in selecting a negotiator;
- 6) The interactions between the negotiation team, the onscene commander, and the SWAT team; and
- 7) How to use a clinical psychologist as a consultant for negotiation.

What Kind of Person Takes Hostages

Articles on the kinds of people who take hostages¹ usually list four major types of hostage takers (HT's):

- 1) "Mentally disturbed" persons;
- 2) Criminals trapped during the commission of crime;
- 3) Prisoners who are revolting;
- 4) Political terrorists attempting to produce social change through the threat or use of violence.

Mentally Disturbed Hostage Takers

Recent information from the special operations and research staff, FBI Academy, Quantico, Va., indicates approximately 52 percent of all hostage incidents involve persons classified as "mentally disturbed." These people typically fall into one of four diagnostic categories including:

- 1) Paranoid schizophrenic;
- 2) Manic-depressive illness; depressed type;
- 3) Antisocial personality; and
- 4) Inadequate personality.

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Paranoid Schizophrenia—Characteristics and Negotiation Approach

The paranoid schizophrenic's thinking is disturbed. In fact, he is so disturbed that he is out of touch with reality, suffering from a psychosis (mentally deranged or insane.)

Two primary symptoms are hallucinations—hearing things or seeing things that are not really there—and delusions—a false system of beliefs—that persist despite evidence to the contrary. The delusions are typically either delusions of grandeur—believing he has special qualities, abilities, or a special mission in life—or delusions of persecution—believing he is being persecuted because he has a special mission or is God's select person, etc.

This type of person often takes hostages in order to carry out what he believes is a "master plan" or to obey "orders" from some "special person." He may believe, for example, that it is his divine mission to end all suffering and violence. He may take hostages with demands that the United States unilaterally disarm and all law enforcement people lay down their weapons and join hands peacefully. The delusion may also involve punishing or retaliating against "sinful" people.

Paranoid schizophrenics are usually above-average in intelligence. Therefore, be very careful about attempting to trick or lie to them. The best approach is to accept their statements as being true for them. Do not try to argue or convince them that their beliefs are wrong. However, you should *not* go so far as to agree that you also hear voices or to say you share their beliefs. You can respond with a statement such as "I can't hear the voice that you do but I understand what you are saying."

Manic-Depressive Illness, Depressed Type—Characteristics and Negotiation Approach

The person who is a manic-depressive is usually so depressed that he is out of touch with reality, suffering from a psychosis (mentally deranged or insane). He may consider himself unworthy to live, feels guilty for past

"sins" he has committed, and often has beliefs that are delusional. He may believe, for example, that he is responsible for all the suffering in the world and his current depression is his punishment for having lived a sinful life. The potential for suicide is extremely high, as is the potential for killing any hostages.

Hostages are often members of the HT's family or persons known to him. He may believe that he would be doing them a favor by killing them and removing them from this "terrible" life.

The HT's speech and movements may be extremely slow. He may take 15 to 30 seconds or longer to answer a question. His thoughts will usually be centered around his unworthiness, his sinfulness, or his delusional feelings of guilt.

When negotiating with a manic-depressive, understanding and support should be provided, along with continual reassurance that he has self-worth. Do not try to tell him that "things aren't that bad." This will make him believe that you do not understand his problem and are unable to help him. Gently interrupt his long statements about "sins" or death and convince him to talk about interests, hobbies, or anything positive, relating these to his self-worth. Watch for *spontaneous* improvement. If he suddenly says, "Everything is okay now—I know what to do," he *may* have decided to kill himself. Gradual improvement over hours of negotiation is a better sign. You may ask him if he has considered killing himself. Asking this question will *not* "put the thought in his mind." In fact, discussing it may help him believe you really understand how badly he feels.

Once rapport has been established, you can be more direct. For example you may say, "Joe, I think you know now that you can trust me. I'd like you to come out and meet me. I know I can help you work this out."

The next two categories of HT's, while in the "mentally disturbed" class, are not psychotic, and therefore, are in contact with reality. These two disorders, called personality disorders or character and behavior disorders, refer to longstanding, maladaptive patterns of behavior that usually develop during adolescence.

Inadequate Personality—Characteristics and Negotiation Approach

Throughout most of his life, the person with an inadequate personality has shown ineffective and inept responses to social, emotional, and physical stress. He will often be a high school dropout and may have had a succession of jobs, having been fired from each because of poor performance. He sees himself as a loser—as someone who has always failed. Taking hostages may be his last attempt to prove to someone (wife, parents, or girlfriend) that he can succeed at something. The hostage incident, including the attention from authority figures and the media, may be the high point of his life.

This type of disorder can be recognized by statements such as "I'll show them that I really can do something" or "I'll show them that I am not the scapegoat anymore." The HT is in contact with reality, is thinking clearly (although immaturely), can understand the consequences of his actions, and can be negotiated with successfully.

When negotiating with the inadequate personality, understanding and uncritical acceptance should be provided. Help him find a way to end the incident without having "failed again." Do not bring parents, friends, etc., to the scene. This may invoke stronger feelings of failure or embarrassment and cause him to prove he can do something important.

Antisocial Personality—Characteristics and Negotiation Approach

A person with an antisocial personality is also known as a sociopath or psychopath. He is the classic "manipulator" or "con artist." One of the most significant symptoms of this personality is the absence of any conscience or guilt feelings. The person has not incorporated into his life the morals and values of our society. This lack of conscience makes it unlikely that he will be concerned for the hostages as human beings. He is often a glib and convincing speaker and presents himself extremely well. He is a "con man," an expert at "snow jobs." Therefore, his hostages are likely to see him as "a nice young man" the authorities are harassing.² He is selfish and strives for physical pleasure. Most of his pursuits revolve around manipulating people to get material gains for himself. He is quite impulsive and will demand immediate satisfaction. He seems unable to profit from past experiences. He does not learn from arrests or involvement with authority figures how to avoid becoming involved with law enforcement personnel.

When negotiating with the antisocial personality, it is important to remember that he is self-centered and will attempt to make things easier for himself. Be careful about using tricks. He is sharp and expects you to try to trick him. He is probably "street-wise" and "police-wise." Don't promise him things he knows you cannot do. He needs frequent stimulation. This should come from the negotiator through frequent contacts. If frequent stimulation is not provided, he may turn to the hostages for excitement.

Criminals

Criminals caught in the act of committing a crime often take hostages. An important first step is to determine

whether this is a mentally disturbed person. After ruling out mental disturbances, you can be fairly sure that you are dealing with a person who has had frequent contact with the law, knows what to expect from the police, and knows what he may need to do to get out of this situation alive. The negotiation process in this case should be a reality-oriented discussion, helping the HT to recognize the facts of the situation and convincing him to accept his physical safety in return for the release of hostages.

Prisoners

Incarcerated persons sometimes riot and take hostages (usually guards). In cases such as these, there is less concern about mental disturbances, since those prisoners who are psychiatrically disturbed are usually removed to institutions for the criminally insane. Riots usually center around complaints concerning prison conditions and demands for improvement. Taking hostages gives the prisoners more bargaining power and a significant amount of media coverage. The fact that the hostages are law enforcement personnel increases the chance of hostages being killed. The preferred response to this type of incident is rapid police action before true leaders of the unruly group begin to emerge. If there is not rapid action, the negotiations should be carried out as if you were dealing with a mentally "normal" criminal.

Terrorists

Terrorists take hostages with the intent of getting as much publicity as possible for their cause. These incidents have usually been planned for months, and the HT's have the physical and psychological support of their fellow members. Usually the demands of the terrorists will go beyond the authority of local police departments, requiring involvement of Federal officials. The likelihood of hostages being killed is very high, since the terrorists will have discussed this possibility and may be prepared to die as "martyrs."

The key to negotiating with terrorists is to convince the HT's that their point has been well-made, their demands have been heard, and killing the hostages would simply serve to discredit them in the eyes of the public.

Why Are Hostages Taken?

Hostages are taken for many reasons, not all of which are initially apparent. In political terrorism, the reasons include showing the public that the government is not able to protect its own citizens. Also, taking hostages virtually guarantees immediate media coverage, and after repeated hostage incidents, it is the hope of the terrorists that the government may overreact and become excessively restrictive with its own citizens, thus causing civil discontent and a grassroots movement to overthrow the government.

Law enforcement personnel are most likely to encounter hostage incidents that involve either criminal acts or the mentally disturbed. If a hostage is taken in a criminal situation, it is usually because the criminal was unable to complete the crime and escape before the police responded, making the taking of hostages a spontaneous event. The criminal's primary reason for taking hostages is to insure his own safety. Therefore, the demands are invariably for safe passage and a means of escape in return for the hostages' lives. It is also very common for them to demand additional money.

A husband or wife may take a child hostage in a custody or domestic dispute. One person believes the other is an unfit parent and should not have the child, and this is the only way he believes he can regain custody of the child.

Finally, a mentally disturbed person may take hostages in order to right what he perceives to be a wrong. He may believe that he has to take hostages in order to carry out some sacred mission or to prove that he can do something important.

Whatever the initial reason for *taking* hostages, it is clear that the motive for *holding* the hostages may change. For example, a criminal interrupted in the act of robbing a bank may initially demand a great deal of money, but later reduce this demand to a guarantee of physical safety or clemency in court. Other HT's may initially demand an immediate change in a government policy or in a prison situation. These demands may eventually change to an agreement for talks with appropriate officials about the conditions. No matter what the initial reason for taking hostages, it is not uncommon for the HT, after some period of time, to be willing to accept a lesser goal.

Hostages—The Stockholm Syndrome

The hostages themselves play an important part in the negotiation process. Although each individual's reaction to being taken hostage is unique, a common set of behaviors referred to as the Stockholm Syndrome is likely to occur. The syndrome consists of one or more of the following behaviors:³

- 1) The hostages will begin to have positive feelings toward their captors;
- 2) The hostages will begin to have negative feelings toward the authorities; or
- 3) The HT's will begin to develop positive feelings toward their hostages.

All three of the behaviors do not have to be present. Although it may not occur to the same extent with all hostages, it should be assumed that at least some portion of this syndrome

will be developed unless the hostage has been abused or isolated.⁴

From a negotiation standpoint, the syndrome has both positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect is that the stronger the development of the Stockholm Syndrome, the less likely it is the HT will kill the hostages. If the third stage of the syndrome has developed and the HT has developed positive feelings toward the hostages, it will be more difficult for him to kill one of them. The negative aspects include:

- 1) Any information coming from the hostages may be unreliable.
- 2) The hostages may deliberately or unconsciously misrepresent the weapons held by the HT. They may have difficulty describing the HT and may, in general, become an advocate of the HT.
- 3) The syndrome may cause interference with plans to rescue the hostages. Hostages may act counter to the commands of the police during an assault. This has caused the death of some hostages, who paradoxically stood up when ordered to lie down when police began firing. There are also documented incidents of released hostages who, after having been debriefed by the police, made their way back through the barricades and reentered the hostage situation.
- 4) Sometimes, due to mistreatment or isolation, hostages do not develop the Stockholm Syndrome. In this case, they may deliberately exaggerate the stated intentions, actions, and weapons carried by the HT. These hostages later stated that they wanted the police to believe the HT was as dangerous as possible, hoping the police would kill him.

- 5) The syndrome may affect the performance of the negotiator. If, after hours of attempting to build rapport and establish trust, it becomes evident that an assault is necessary, it may be emotionally difficult for the negotiator to distract the HT during the initiation of an assault.

In spite of these negative aspects, promotion of the Stockholm Syndrome will help us reach our primary goal—the safe release of the hostages.

There are a number of factors that affect the development of the Stockholm Syndrome.⁵ The most important factor is simply the passage of time. The second factor is whether the hostages are isolated from the HT, and the third factor is whether there is positive contact between the HT and the hostages. If the hostages are kept in frequent contact with the HT and if the contact is characterized by lack of negative experience, the passage of time will help the development of the Stockholm Syndrome. Conversely, if the HT abuses the hostages or if the hostages are isolated, either by being in a separate room or by being hooded, the passage of time will not significantly aid in the development of the Stockholm Syndrome.

If it is known that the hostages are hooded or isolated, every attempt should be made to get the HT to interact with the hostages. He could be asked to gather such information as names of hostages or names of relatives and children or information concerning the medical condition of the hostages. Each of these interactions between the HT and the hostage will personalize the hostage, making him

more a human being rather than an anonymous person. The positive aspects of the Stockholm Syndrome significantly outweigh any negative aspects. Therefore, the development of the syndrome should be promoted in any way possible.

Having discussed the Stockholm Syndrome and the various personalities of hostage takers, the concluding segment of this article will present information on the process of negotiation.

FBI

(Continued next month)

Footnotes

¹ Conrad V. Hassel, "The Hostage Situation: Exploring the Motivation and Cause," *The Police Chief*, September 1975, and John G. Stratton, "The Terrorist Act of Hostage Taking: A View of Violence," *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, January 1978, p. 1.

² Frederick J. Lanceley, "The Antisocial Personality as a Hostage Taker," unpublished manuscript, FBI Academy, Quantico, Va.

³ Frank M. Ochburg, "What is Happening to the Hostages in Tehran?" *Psychiatric Annals*, May 1980, p. 186.

⁴ Thomas Sirentz, "Law Enforcement Policy and Ego Defenses of the Hostage," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, April 1979, p. 1.

⁵ Ibid.

END