

Express kidnap



The true story of an express kidnap on the streets of London.

Mark Deane in *ExploreSecure*, 2017

The case-study that follows tells the story of Adam, a young professional heading back from a bar early one morning in a nice suburb of Greater London, UK. This fascinating true story, told for the first time in this article identifies that the risk of this threat exists throughout the world, and that situations can develop, and deteriorate quickly.

Express Kidnap—A Global Threat

Business Travelers are often cognizant of the risks to personal safety when traveling to cities classed as high-risk or non-permissive, however, threats such as Express Kidnap can (and do) manifest themselves in any city throughout the world.

Express Kidnap is a method of abduction by criminals, usually quick, violent in nature and where a small ransom is either demanded, normally from the family or employer of the victim, or the victim is forced to withdraw money from their ATM account. Often Express Kidnap gangs will orchestrate a scenario, either through pre-attack planning, or dynamic assault of an individual or group. The most common method is to forcefully gain and maintain control of the victim/s inside a vehicle. Then drive the victim/s around to different ATMs, and have them provide their PINs (normally through intimidation and force), withdrawing the largest amount/s possible.

Surprise Attack

Adam was walking back to his home in Clapham Common, an affluent section of South London after having spent the evening with friends in the local bars and nightclubs. At approximately 0400hrs that morning, after realizing he had no money left for a taxi or bus decided to walk the short distance home (approximately one mile) through a part of Clapham he knew very well and had lived in for two years. Adam later stated 'I felt relaxed, completely safe and had no fear for my personal safety'.

The first he knew of the attack was being punched to the ground, his assailants likely coming

from behind. Adam had been drinking, although not heavily and through his own admission had no situational awareness and had switched off to his surroundings.

On the floor, Adam fast realized he was dealing with multiple attackers who were beating him with fists and kicking him. He curled into a ball on the ground and just attempted to minimize the damage that may ensue. Adam heard a vehicle pull swiftly up to them, he was dragged to his feet and bundled into the back seats, where he for the first time managed to see that there was one male driver, one front seat passenger and one male with him in the backseat that had him restrained in a headlock. His now captors placed a bag over his head, and held him in a tight headlock face down making it very difficult for Adam to breathe. Adam's pockets were emptied while still being held "I remember the guy in the back holding me down was very aggressive, smelt of alcohol and was going through my wallet asking me for all of my pin numbers to the credit cards". Adam decided to tell the truth and gave all of his pin numbers hoping that he would be released as soon as they had his money. Adam recalls "The vehicle kept on stopping and there would be movement in and out of the car, doors opening and closing. I assumed this was the front passenger getting in and out of the vehicle to use the ATMs'. Adam's assumptions were correct as this was later confirmed during the subsequent police investigation.

The Situation Escalates Quickly

During this process his captor in the back was becoming more and more aggressive, seemingly more agitated. He put a gun to Adam's head and then repeatedly hit him with it. Adam recalls "I remember being very scared by this as even if he didn't kill me a negligent discharge of the firearm would have done the job". It transpired that the agitation of the captors was because they could not determine which pin number was for which ATM card and possibly thought that Adam was lying to them. "I wasn't lying" states Adam "but these guys seemed not only drunk but also very stupid and completely disorganized".

First Escape Attempt

The driving around lasted roughly one hour, with the situation growing increasingly tense. Adam was repeatedly struck around the head with the pistol and the assailant in the rear seat was becoming more and more violent. Adam remembers: "There was very loud music being played, violent Gangster style rap about killing people. The Guy who held me was saying to me — this is my music, this is what we are going to do to you". This is the point at which Adam decided he had to try and do something. But just then another person joined them in the rear of the vehicle. Adam is unsure whether this was the front passenger or an entirely new person. The beatings and threats continued but then the vehicle stopped and the new rear passenger exited. This was Adam's chance he thought:

"I decided to pretend to pass out in the hope that the captor would loosen his grip. He did a little bit so, summoning up the courage, I tried to jump out of the moving vehicle, but as soon as I tensed and moved the captor overpowered me and stabbed me in the leg with a flick knife that I had not previously seen. Which put a stop to my plan pretty quickly, and painfully"

By this point Adam had been driven around for approximately one and a half hours and suddenly the vehicle stopped. As it was mid summer it was now light and Adam had moved

his head just a fraction to see a tiny bit through the bag over his head. He saw a Black male in his late teens with a pierced ear and a baseball cap; this was the driver. Adam moved ever so slightly and caught a glimpse of his aggressive and agitated captor holding him in the rear of the vehicle: 'he was a black male approximately 20 years old, and had a tight woolen jumper on — both the rear passenger and driver were writing text messages on an old Nokia style phone and passing it between each other. "I presumed this was as the driver did not want to speak as only the guy in the back had spoken throughout my ordeal — maybe he had a distinctive accent."

Adam had a small window with which to make mental notes, he recalls remembering that the driving had been very smooth and controlled and started wondering whether they were professionals and that this could be the end of him. He had already given over all of his possessions, pin numbers and cash and now, nearly two hours in, there was no sign of being released. " This was the pivotal moment for me in the ordeal" Adam noted. "I began to deliberate over the best path to take. There was one part of me that desperately hoped nothing would happen and that I would be let go shortly. There was another part of me that thought: ' won't I feel like a complete idiot if I am chained to a radiator in a couple of hours about to be shot because I was too weak to put up a fight." Adam continues to identify how he felt. " As you can imagine there was a huge argument inside my head. It is hard to explain how difficult it was to make the decision.

I was incredibly fearful of what might happen. As a guy who only ever ventured into a gym to find a vending machine the decision to take on three (maybe four) South London gangsters, one of whom had already stabbed me and I knew had a pistol and the other two or three god knows what they had, it was a tough decision. I remember very clearly recalling something my father had told me years ago. It seems strange thinking about it now but it was very clear to me then. I remember him telling me the story how he saved a child trapped under a huge piece of concrete, the adrenaline gave him superhuman strength, and this stuck with me'.

Second Escape Attempt

Adam started screaming at himself internally willing the adrenaline and gaining the courage to initiate his attack. "I screamed and screamed like you wouldn't believe without making a sound. Still thinking about this over a year later this is the one part that brings back the most emotion," Adam recalls. Trying to give the appearance of being unconscious Adam was drawing on everything he had endured throughout the ordeal — he had been suffocating slowly under the bag, he had been stabbed in the leg and badly beaten around the head but he was willing all of his adrenaline for the next opportunity.

The vehicle stopped and the car door opened, his captors dragged him from the vehicle and at that moment he chose to escape. "I ripped the bag from my head and punched the first guy in the face. I have no idea which guy it was, but after that I just ran but I was heavily disoriented and took a bad route. One of the guys grabbed my legs and the other two threw punches and kicks until I was on the ground, and then proceeded to rain kicks and punches on my face and body. They were going crazy stamping on my head and punching me, but I was screaming for help and punching back. Then one of the attackers tried to gag me by putting his fist in my mouth, I bit through his hand and then I blacked out'. Adam was beaten unconscious and dragged away by his captors. The screaming and shouting for help had however gained some attention. Two emergency calls to the police were received from local residents.

The captors now dragged Adam up a flight of stairs to a residential block of apartments and took him into a small apartment. Adam recalls: "I woke up slumped in the hallway of a small apartment with the same three people as the vehicle, within seconds of waking up my mind was clear: I was about to be murdered; so I decided to act immediately. Although I had zero plan or forethought I just knew I had to do something. "

Now or Never

Adam stood up and immediately attacked the nearest captor, punching him in the face, and bolted for the front door. Upon opening the door the other assailants had reached him and, whether they meant to or not, ended up throwing him down the stairs in the ensuing tussle. "I remember sliding head first down the stairs and feeling elated, I was getting a head start and my body was so numb from adrenaline and all of the beatings I felt no pain. I landed at the bottom of the stairs and immediately ran.' Upon exiting the apartment building Adam ran through the car park, shouting loudly for help to attract attention and ran approximately 500 meters to the nearest public phone where he immediately dialed 999 (The UK Emergency number) and shouted that he had been kidnapped. Within minutes armed police and an ambulance were on the scene and his ordeal was finally over. It appeared that the shouting had gained attention and most likely scared the hostiles from pursuing.

Case Study Analysis

There is no mistaking — this was a horrific ordeal for Adam that could have ended very badly indeed. He showed resilience, maintained composure to build a picture of the gravity of his situation and acted decisively when he felt his life was in grave danger. There is also no mistaking however, that some sensible control measures could have prevented this: retaining sufficient cash to pay for a taxi (or indeed paid by card), refraining from such a late return home when the streets are empty and above all recognizing that the combination of the late hour and his condition would make him vulnerable, and therefore adjust his plan. Certain lessons on travel safety can be taught and it may be worth for Organizations to consider utilizing Travel Safety Training.

Many business travelers return back to hotels late, sometimes after social time with clients (a few alcoholic drinks may even be imbibed), and sometimes on their own. In non-local environments this places you at increased risk of being targeted.

Avoiding Express Kidnap

This case study serves as a reminder that the risks we face when traveling in less permissive environments can just as easily manifest themselves closer to home. The best practice method to avoid Express Kidnap is to act early to avoid becoming embroiled in an incident. The very best way of doing this when traveling on business is by utilizing trusted drivers and vehicles, either on-call, or with you at all times. Services such as [ExecSecure](#). Removing the risk of being left to walk home, stood on the street waiting for options to appear, utilizing public transport, or becoming impatient with waiting so taking the chance and jumping into any Taxi or ride share service.