

# AMERICAN SURVIVOR

Survival Information For The Prepared Citizen

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**IN THIS ISSUE: Error Precursors, Camouflage, Night Vision, More**

## Error Precursors In Survival Situations

By Jim Jones

As a Safety Manager, I am often involved in investigating accidents or “near miss” incidents where an otherwise safe and well-trained employee committed one or more errors that were not “normal” or logical. Often the person had been doing it right for years and deviated from safe behavior because of one or more “error precursors” effecting his or her actions. The employee may have been required to change shifts frequently, had a death in the family or some other “life event” that caused fatigue, distraction, and frustration. Under these conditions their mind was not on task and they were not mentally there. The answer to the question “what were you thinking?” is often “I don’t know”.

Error precursors are sources of stress that can lead to human factor errors. Human factor errors often lead to injury or damages that result in more stress. If these factors are present in the workplace, they are a much bigger factor under survival conditions. In other words, you are most likely to make mistakes when you can least afford them. In a survival situation you may already be

injured or in serious danger. Others may be depending on you to act, but these are exactly the situations that one is most likely to make errors. Errors in life can lead to survival situations but errors in survival situations can be fatal.

Error precursors are mental states that arise from four factors. These factors are: Situational Demands, The Environment, Individual Capabilities, and Human Nature. Each of these factors can serious effect the individual’s capacity to respond effectively to challenging and dangerous situations. Lets look at each of these factors and consider how best to reduce or control them.

### Situational Demands

There is nothing more demanding than a life-or-death, survival situation. Some of the error precursors at work are:

**Time pressure (hurry):** In many cases such as CPR, bleeding, combat or a fire, action must be taken within seconds. Often the most important decision in your life must be made in a minute or two without help

or further information. **Without training you are forced to guess what to do or do nothing.**

**High workload:** In survival situations you may need to work harder mentally and physically than you have ever done. **Staying in shape is a big help. Take care not to become exhausted or injured, making things worse for everyone.**

**Unclear task requirements:** What should I do? Should you run, help, get out of the way or something else? The “right” action is not always clear and the “wrong” action could make things worse. **Planning and training will help you make the right choices here.**

**Simultaneous requirements:** What to do first? Call for help? Move the victim? Take cover? Put out the fire? **Planning and training will help you make the right choices here.**

## **Situation Environment**

The environment is often part of the survival problem. It may be cold, dark, wet, noisy, smoky, etc. Environmental error precursors include:

**Weather:** Excessive cold or heat can seriously affect your mental state, leading to mistakes in judgment and action. **Be aware of the dangers of hypothermia and dehydration. Stay dry. Stay hydrated.**

**Distractions:** Other people yelling, noise, light and gunfire all can take your focus off of doing the right thing right when you need to. **Only training and experience can help you tune out distractions and focus on what counts.**

**Personal conflicts:** Other people who are panicked or becoming combative under stress can cause individual and group errors. **Take charge. Be firm. Assign tasks to keep everyone busy.**

**Confusing information:** Survival situations are often confusing. What happened? Who is doing what? What are the hazards? How much time do we have? **Being aware of your situation and surroundings at all times can help. Thinking “what if?” before “it” happens can also help.**

**Location:** Location can lead to errors, especially if the location is unfamiliar or changing. A Midwesterner can make serious errors in mountains or deserts. What works in the country will kill you in the city and vice-versa. **If you are in an unfamiliar location, you may have to limit your actions or be extra cautious. When in any new place gather information (recon and intelligence) just in case. Know routes, exits, obstructions, equipment, etc.**

**Hostile action:** Being assaulted, shot at or even threatened will cause an adrenalin rush and the “fight-or-flight” reaction that may be an error in some cases. These survival reflexes kept our ancestors alive. Thinking takes too long when a saber-toothed tiger is stalking you. **You may not be able to fight the hazard and you may run into more trouble than you are escaping. Only training can combine the survival reaction with the correct choices.**

## **Individual Capabilities**

Mental, emotional and physical capabilities will effect actions under

stress. Error precursors related to individual capabilities include:

**Illness:** Illness may be the survival situation or it may be caused by the situation. Unfortunately the illness may negatively effect decisions. **Just be aware of how your illness or pain may be effecting your decision. In some cases you may have to endure pain in the short-term to survive in the long-term.**

**Fatigue:** Fatigue is the inevitable result of a survival situation. In some cases staying awake and staying alive are linked. The stress of survival situations will affect the quality and quantity of sleep until thinking is affected. **Always be well rested, hydrated and nourished so you will be better able to cope with a survival situation. Under survival conditions try to rest and nap anytime you can. Do not waste energy.**

**Attitude:** This is a big one. A negative attitude or an "it's not my problem" attitude will almost guarantee bad decisions and errors. **You can change your own attitude! In a survival situation you must have an "I can get through this", "I can do this", "it's up to me" attitude. If you do not have that attitude "normally" you will not have it when you need it most. Then only luck will save you.**

**Experience:** Those who have experienced emergencies and hardships in the past usually make better and faster survival decisions and fewer errors. Kids who came up under tough conditions are usually (not always) better under survival conditions. **Hardcore survival training can compensate**

**somewhat for lack of actual experience.**

**Training and knowledge:** When training and knowledge provide the right answer errors are less likely. Obviously you cannot do the right thing if you do not know what it is or how to do it. **Knowledge works if time is not a factor. Only hands-on training works under pressure.**

## Human Nature

**Habits:** "I do it this way all the time". A habit like dressing too lightly, standing up or talking can get you killed under some situations. Even good habits can be dangerous under changing survival situations. **Under survival conditions, everything you do has to be measured against what needs to be done under the circumstances. What was a basic value ten minutes ago may have to be abandoned now.**

**Attention span:** Attention spans decrease under pressure. The mind tends to jump from one issue to another without acting to solve anything. Focusing on one problem at a time may be essential. All that adrenalin makes the mind race. **You may even jump to thinking about the future or what is going on at other places. You must "be here now" and focus on doing one correct thing at a time.**

**Assumptions:** Assumptions are not knowledge. Help may not come. The water may not be safe. Those folks may not be friendly. What worked before may not work now. **While we have to make some assumptions, we must be sure that critical assumptions are correct and not just hopes. All of life's critical issues must be covered by**

**effective actions and back-up options.**

**Tunnel vision:** Under stress, people tend to focus on the most immediate and obvious problem. The guy bleeding, the guy with the gun, the fire. This can tune out other threats and other options for survival. It's the adrenalin again! It actually reduces your peripheral vision and thinking. **There is no easy answer here. Again, training and experience reduce the reaction time and broaden vision. When possible, take a minute to think and take a look around before acting. There may or may not be other threats, other needs or other options.**

**Over confidence:** No matter how much training you have or how good you are at survival skills you can be wrong and you can fail. Know that and you are stronger. Special Forces people have been killed on tourist rafting trips because of over confidence. **Confidence is a necessity, but be aware of your limitations and be willing to ask for help.**

**Fear:** Fear can cause you to freeze when you need to act. Fear of heights, water or enclosures may stop you from escaping. Fear of your doing the wrong thing or looking foolish may prevent you from surviving or helping others. **Some fears can be overcome through training. Fear is normal and to some degree healthy. You must recognize it and control it to avoid panic reactions and errors.**

## **Conclusion**

Being aware of error precursors and their causes can prevent serious accidents and injuries in everyday life.

The loss of a loved one, the death of a pet, something that made you angry, lack of sleep or other stress sources can set you up for more trouble. Being aware of your own mental state and how these may affect your choices in traffic, at your job or at home could save you life. Under a survival situation you are already pre-loaded to make errors when you can least afford them. Self-awareness and self-control will help prevent errors. Training and experience will reduce stress and direct reactions towards the correct action.

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## **Survival Camouflage**

**By Jim Jones**

Camouflage is not just a pattern on clothing. Camouflage is whatever one does to avoid notice or detection. It is a combination of appearance and action that reduces the distinction between the person and the environment. The person wearing woodland camouflage clothing in the city is not camouflaged while the guy wearing jeans and a sweatshirt is well camouflaged. In survival there are two classes of camouflage. There is Passive Camouflage that is used to avoid being noticed or avoid standing out from others. There is also Active Camouflage that is used to avoid being seen by those actively looking for you.

Passive camouflage should be used in everyday life. You can look like an outdoor person without looking like a survivalist. In urban areas gray and tans are good camouflage without looking like camouflage. In areas where hunting and fishing are common actual camouflage (e.g. Woodland, tree bark, etc.) may be

okay. In many cases the jeans and T-shirt or slacks and sweater may be true camouflage. While you may like to wear "Don't Tread on Me" shirts or full camouflage pattern clothes at gun shows or survival group meetings it is not advised for street attire.

Active camouflage is an important part of military survival training and is also practiced by hunters and to some extent by law enforcement. In survival situations camouflage can be used to evade detection by criminals and looters. It can aid in hunting game for food and it gives the survivor the choice of when and if he or she becomes visible to others. While modern infrared and night vision technology can limit the effectiveness of camouflage they have limitations and may not be in use by those you are trying to evade. So knowing the principles of camouflage will remain an important survival skill. There are five key elements to good camouflage. They are:

**Shape:** The human form is distinctive from most surroundings. A round head peering over a rock will be noticed. A straight rifle barrel stands out from bent and forked branches. Using branches, camouflage netting, etc. to break up your shape and that of your equipment.

**Shining:** Cover, enclose or wrap up anything you have that will reflect light. This includes jewelry, watches, glasses, buttons, belt buckles and binoculars. One glint of light off of these day or night can undo all your camouflage work.

**Silhouette:** This is your shape against the background. Are the sun or moon or street lights silhouetting

you? A white gravel road, a snowy field or smoke can make you stand out as a target. I once detected a well-camouflaged ambush because the setting sun was behind them as they hid in the bushes.

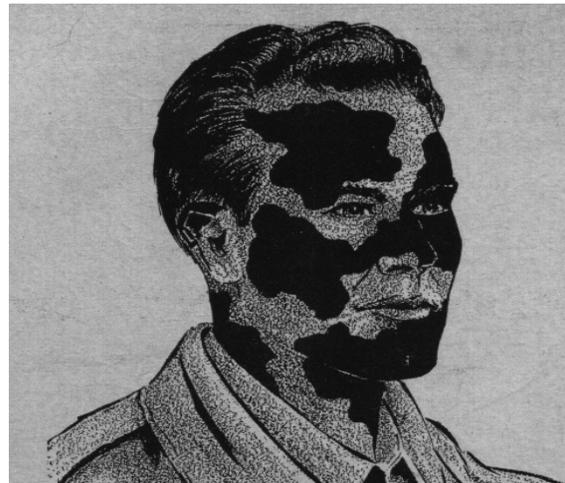


**Shadow:** You may be well hidden from direct view, but your shadow may give you away. If you have successfully broken up your shape it will help. Keeping low will also reduce your shadow. You must be aware of your shadow and use the shadows of trees and rocks to cover your shadow when possible. Shadows are especially distinct against flat surfaces like buildings, roads and snowy fields. We once used near perfect winter camouflage to blend into the snow and the pines only to realize that our clear black-on-white shadows gave us away.



**Shading:** The colors and the shade (dark or light) of the camouflage is the most important element. It must match the environment as closely as possible in pattern and color. As you move from one location (e.g. dry grass) to another (e.g. green forest) the effectiveness of your camouflage may be lost and require changing. Ghillie suits and netting is good for staying in one location, but tends to snag, pull and tear during movement. Fortunately there is a big selection of camouflage clothing for just about every location and season. If you will be moving from civilization (I'm just a hiker) to escape and evasion you may have to use basic dark and earth tone clothing enhanced by foliage and paint when needed. Apply camouflage paint in patches or stripes across the face based on the patterns of light and shadow in the environment. The eye sockets, cheeks and below the chin are generally shaded and therefore should get most of the lighter green and tan colors, while the more exposed nose, ears and forehead get the darker green and black tones. Don't forget the neck and the back of the hands. If you don't have camouflage paint, dirt and charcoal can be used. Carrying camouflage

gloves and a face net or mask is handy if you don't have time for paint.



## Other Factors

Camouflage alone will not be sufficient if you fail to consider these factors.

**Movement:** Movement attracts the eye. Slow movement is often missed even if camouflage is poor. Ninjas were masters of camouflage, and stealth and very, very slow movement. When you must move through a location where observation is likely, move slowly and stay low.

**Secondary motion:** As you move you may move branches and tall grass or stir up dust. This may give away your presence and location.

**Sight level:** Whenever you stop moving or are observing, do it while crouching or lying down. People naturally look at eye level. The lower you are the more you blend in to the ground and are literally overlooked.

**Noise discipline:** Your equipment must not bang, squeak or rattle. Water canteens must not gurgle or slosh. **NO TALKING!** Use hand signals or low, in-your-ear whispers.

**Light discipline:** No flashlights or matches or cell phones at night. When absolutely necessary, red lens lights can be used under a tarp or low in bushes just long enough to read a map, fix a weapon or render first aid.

**Time selection:** If you can do so, select a time to move through an area that will be best for you. Maybe there is more noise to cover your movement at a certain time. Maybe it is foggy in the morning. Is there a full moon? How will the sun's location affect your visibility? Night or day?

**Route selection:** Route selection makes the best use of all available concealment, including low areas in the ground, foliage, background, lighting and of course the location of the hostile observers. Moving through thick woods may give good concealment, but make a great deal of noise. Gravel roads are noisy. Look at the map below to see how routes would differ from day to night.



## Conclusion

Good camouflage and stealth techniques can keep you safe, prevent the need to engage in combat or flight and let you get in and out of places you need to get in and out of safely. Learn to do it well. We once sent out a “patrol” along a trail and we had an “ambush” set up for them. The “patrol” was so stealthy and the



## Life and Freedom Award 2010

The Live Free Life and Freedom Award is presented annually to one individual who has performed outstanding service to the preservation of human life and individual liberty through self-reliance, emergency preparedness and self-protection. Past recipients include Jim Benson former editor of American Survival magazine, Christopher Nyerges author of “How to Survive Anywhere” and frequent contributor to our newsletter, and Richard Fleetwood the creator of the Survival Ring web site. No one offered any nominations for 2009 so there was no award. Some suggested nominations for the 2010 award are:

- David Duffy: Publisher/Editor of Backwoods Home Magazine
- Holly Drennan Dayo: Author of the book Dare to Prepare
- James Wesley, Rawles: Author of the book “Patriots”

- Ron Hood: Creator of the Hoods Wood video and website

We welcome additional nominations and comments from members.

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## Night Vision Tips

When moving from a well-lit area into the dark, turn away from the lights and close your eyes for a few minutes before proceeding. This will give your night vision time to adapt and become more acute. Anyone assigned to security duties at night should never sit around a fire or a lamp. When it is necessary to use a flashlight or other illumination at night, close one eye and read and look with the other. This way you preserve 50% of your night vision. When looking “at” something, look a little off to the side of it. Your peripheral vision will be better than your center vision. Have a red lens light for night work. Red is far less visible to others and will not affect your night vision as much.

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## Twig Fences

One of the techniques we invented years ago for camp security was the twig and branch fence. In most wooded areas there is a lot of “dead fall” large branches and even whole small trees. While we used the shorter and heavier wood for the campfire, the long multi-branched “dead-fall” was used to construct a twig and branch fence around the camp. We simply raised and interlaced the branches with the upright trees to form a barrier from the ground to about 5-feet high. This barrier would slow down anyone approaching the camp and was just about impossible to

remove or penetrate without making a racket. In addition, it was fast to put up, looked natural and was practically invisible. We would set the fence up on a rough circle about 50-feet out from the camp. We would end the fence further out than the start and overlap about 10-feet. This left an opening for us parallel to the fence and between the two sides. Anyone approaching directly towards the camp would not find this entrance. It was a safe alternative to other security methods that could injure innocent visitors or camp members.

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## Smoke Screens for Survival

Smoke has been used to facilitate escape or hide movement since ancient times. Although radar and infrared technologies have reduced the effectiveness of smoke, it still has applications. Most modern military vehicles still have smoke dischargers that launch a spread of smoke grenades and smoke grenades are still issued to troops. Under survival conditions smoke can be used to attract the attention of rescuers, create a diversion for hostile groups or temporarily screen movement from one point to another. Under “normal” or semi-normal conditions a cloud of smoke will attract the attention of police, fire and rescue personnel. Where there is smoke there is usually fire, and fire spreads, so everyone reacts to the sight of smoke. A well-placed smoke bomb can also be used to draw people towards one place and thus away from another. This could be needed to facilitate an escape or rescue. The most common use of smoke is as a smoke screen to reduce visibility. This is for the most hostile situations when you need to protect yourself from gun fire or you need to screen your direction of

movement long enough to escape. Creating a smoke screen usually requires at least two or three smoke bombs thrown or placed to assure a solid overlapping cloud at ground level for at least two minutes. The effectiveness of a smoke screen depends greatly on weather conditions. No wind allows the smoke to go straight up without screening anything. High winds disperse the smoke too fast. Ideally low wind and damp conditions keep the smoke down and in a long screen. The best location for a smoke screen is with the sun shining on it and bouncing back towards the enemy. Having the sun shining through the smoke towards the enemy can accentually silhouette you passing behind it. Before using your smoke bombs you need to know exactly what the wind direction is. If there are fires, flags or gun smoke in the area you can observe that. Otherwise light some damp paper or rubber bands, etc. to make a small test smoke. I always carry several smoke bombs in my survival pack. Forget the tiny thumb-size smoke bombs sold with fireworks. They could be your test smoke but, do not generate enough smoke to even draw attention. The larger 1-inch diameter by 5-inch long smoke-bombs sold for fireworks and paintball games do put out enough smoke to be usable for signals and for smoke-screens. These put out a dense cloud for about 1-minute and are available in several colors in addition to white. There are also "sportsman" signal smoke bombs and

boater's smoke signal flairs. These are more durable and easier to light, but more expensive. Those little hand-grenade style smoke bombs they make for paintball games will work for signaling, but not too well for screening unless you carry a lot of them. Smoke bombs do put out a very hot flame and heat! They will set fire to dry brush and grass. They will set fire to buildings if used indoors. They will even burn through thin metal cans. Try a few smoke bombs outdoors in a safe area to get a feel for how much they generate and how long they last. Smoke bombs make a good addition to the survival pack.



An M-60 tank is almost invisible in a cloud generated by one 1 x 6 inch smoke bomb. Note the person standing on the left while a person on the right is not visible.

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