

On Patrol at the Mall: Snipers on the Roof!

On any given weekend, shopping malls are filled with scurrying, wide-eyed people, maxing out their credit cards, and bolting down a barf-in-the-bag hot dog, as they frantically race to the next 10% off sale. And on these crowded days, what you won't find at the malls are many, if any, Combat Warriors.

Why not? You ask. Real simple. We don't like crowds. Even though these are target rich environments, it's nearly impossible to keep track of everything going on around you every minute you're there. To a Warrior, it's a life and death matter to be "Aware of your surroundings at all times!"

I'll explain why your just-returned-home-from-war spouse or partner is nervous as hell going to the mall with you, when he or she is supposed to be "Enjoying your company" and relaxing in the middle of a division of shopping Nazis.

First of all, to this day, I don't like going to malls, or any other place where there are too many people. How many? Well, anything over about 10 to 15 is max. You'll notice how your Warrior's head starts turning a lot more and nervousness increases as the number of people increases. I guarantee that it is not the same when they're back with their units, regardless of the number of Warriors. That's because someone is "watching your back" at all times. The enemy's not gonna sneak up on you and ruin your meal at the chow hall.

When walking up to a mall structure, I always check the roof tops for cameras, unusual objects and snipers. Actually, the procedure is the same for any structure. When walking in the bush (country), the ridge line is of greatest concern.

As I enter the mall, and staying to the middle of the covered walkway (don't know what it's called; don't want to) I make it a point to look back so that I can orientate myself. This is to remember where I entered (what it looks like) in the event I need to leave in a hurry. I also check for barriers (they offer protection under fire) and alternate exit routes. Corners are dark places where an enemy may be hiding. I check every one before walking past.

If my objective for visiting a place like that is to buy something I can't possibly find anywhere else, I purchase what I went in for, and get out as quickly as time permits. Going to a movie is a rare thing. But if I do, it's gonna be the first, mid-day showing since it's less crowded, and the seats against the back wall always seem to feel the safest. That is, unless I go with a "friend." That gives us two pairs of eyes, and the survival rate increases.

Open mall restaurants are usually out, unless I can locate a position with a 360 degree view: a good field of fire. Standard Denny's type restaurants are OK, if while sitting at a counter seat you're facing a mirror to check your 6 o'clock; corner booths are acceptable.

Sounds a little paranoid? No shit! But a person gets use to just about anything over time. And now, as old as I am, this seems like the normal and safe attitude for me. Hell, it's worked!

"You couldn't or wouldn't live like that!" you say. Oh yes you could and would, if you lived in a country where people do snipe at you from roof tops, do rush you with a bomb strapped to their chest, and do attack you from dark corners, while you're trying to grab a little chow. The only difference is, it doesn't happen much in the States just yet. Maybe it never will, but why take the chance?

So you spouses, cut your heroes some "slack", and you Vets, cut yourself a lot of slack. It makes perfect sense to keep doing things that keep you safe. And every time you make it home from the mall, you've made it back from a patrol, alive and in one piece. Seems reasonable to keep up the same tactics, doesn't it? Besides, it keeps you "frosty" (alert).

"Expect the Unexpected!" is an attitude that can bring good things and not such good things across your trail. Depends on the way you're thinkin' about your life. That means, how open you are to change, how grateful and accepting you are of positive events, or how fearful and paranoid you might be. For this Old Knuckle Dragger, it's worked out real well, to be able to smell the flowers and welcome pleasant times, yet keep a round chambered for a snake on the path. Most of 'em had two legs.

But I didn't always feel so good about life. And for a good many years, I did in fact expect a snake under every bush. Reminds me of a time back in the late 70's. My attitude then, was to carry an olive-drab umbrella wherever I went. Seemed like the Great Bird of "Wake-up-calls," had a real likin' for yours truly. Every time I thought it was safe to come out of the bunker, that sucker had me zeroed-in. Hell, the only way I could have made it easier for him would have been to paint a white X on my head.

You do not have to go through that! But in case you're a bit snake-shy, or afraid to look up, you might just "think," about what you're thinkin'. It does make a difference.

Well anyway, there I was, in the late 70's, in beautiful Boulder, Colorado, tagging along like a stray dog with my first wife. It was decided that our next stop should be one of the best known health food stores in this quiet little college town. Of course, I was well concealed as usual. No long-haired, shit-throwin' enemy of the time was gonna get this Jar Head in his cross-hairs. I blended right in, with my short trimmed beard, sun glasses, hat, military field jacket, jeans and jungle boots. Yep! They couldn't pick my ass out of a line up in the Psycho-Ward.

Boulder was a quaint little town in those days, and after a nice stroll along the main drag, and a slight tug on the leash, we came to our destination. It was about what I expected, a freak show from Barnum and Bailey's Circus. Checking the roof line, and the guitar playing peace-lovers sitting in front of the store, I walked up, stepped over a body, and entered the land of fruits and nuts.

My orders were to locate a kind of horse-feed-type cereal that tasted like dirt with raisins in it. Think it was called granola. Anyway, while sorting through the feed bins and looking at the "Save the Whales" and "Save a Tree" posters (guess saving Tibet wasn't in style yet), I noticed the usual "He's gotta' be a pig" glares from the local "Bong" Club.

Had my under-cover disguise failed? Nah, couldn't of.

Still feeling secure, that my true identity hadn't been discovered, I was also feeling frustrated by not being able to complete my assignment. Then I thought, "maybe the clerk could help, if he wasn't stoned?" but there was no clerk in sight. There was however, a small round bell on the counter, so I walked up, tapped a couple of times, and waited.

There were a couple of small tables in front of the large glass window next to the door, so while I was waiting, it was somewhat entertaining to watch the acid freaks picking tofu burger-crumbs out of their beards and rolling dessert in Zig Zag papers.

Finally, the clerk walked up behind the counter, and while smiling behind a display of Dr. Bronners "All-in-One" Soap, asked if he could help me. He seemed pleasant enough, and not a very large man, but oddly familiar. After discovering that the breakfast feed was over by the squirrel food (trail mix?), and walking back to pay the bill, it dawned on me just why this clerk might be so familiar. After paying the bill, my curiosity got the best of me. I always needed to know my enemy, to be aware of my surroundings, but could this possibly be happening in Boulder, Colorado?

His accent sounded too close for comfort, so I asked him if he'd ever been to Vietnam. "I was born there," he replied, as a little surge of adrenaline cranked into my veins.

Then he asked, "Were you ever in my country?" "Yes," I said, "I was touring with the Marine Corps near Chu Lai." Nodding his head slightly, he replied, "Oh yes! I know that area very well." Then he looked right into my eyes and said, "I also was touring Chu Lai, but with the N.V.A." (North Vietnamese Army)

For a moment, time stopped, as we just stared into each other's soul. Yes, we were both Warriors, and yes, a short time ago, we were enemies. Feeling completely off guard, and confused, I said the only thing that I was feeling at the time, "I'm glad the war is over, and we both made it out alive."

A faint smile formed at the corners of his mouth. Then with a sigh, he held his hand out to me. I also reached out, and in that moment of peace, two Warriors shook hands. Not only had we stood on common ground in war, we also stood on common ground in the knowing of the consequences that war brings to every Warrior. Without a word being spoken, we completely understood each other.

We both nodded as a sign of respect to each other. And as I turned and left the store, I remember thinking, how this man was once my enemy, but in fact, he was a Fellow Warrior, and that "I respect him far more than these hippie trash that are supposed to be Americans". I never went back to Boulder, Colorado again. One traumatic experience like this in my life was enough.

So what's the point of all this, you ask? The point of all this, my Younglings, is that it's perfectly alright to stay alert at all times, to expect the unexpected at all times. And even then, you may be surprised at the bends in the trail. And if you Warriors catch any flack about acting a little different, just remember that You are different. Also remember the "I don't give a shit" philosophy.

Besides, would you really want to be like everyone else again? Next time you're in a super market buying chow and checking for points of escape and evasion (exits) look around at the people in line with you. Sometimes it still shocks the hell out of me.

As I'm checking everyone out for possible weapons, general posture, and attitude, I'm amazed by the number of dull expressions, lack of awareness of their surroundings, and the way they slowly push their carts up to the check-out. A dumb-ass sloth could move faster in putting its groceries on the little black moving belt! Damn! Talk about the living dead! Somebody please pull the pin, or at least crank off a few rounds!

And you think you've got it bad? I tell you my fellow Warriors, I'd rather walk around a little shy of a six-pack any day, with all of my "Challenges" (yuppie, shrinker term) than fall in step with the lemmings (small rat-like creatures).

So improvise, overcome, and adapt. You'll be happier.

From: "The Warriors Guide to Insanity" By Sgt. PTSD Brandi, U.S.M.C. Never Retired?
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