



# 1976 Chowchilla kidnapping

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**1976 Chowchilla kidnapping** occurred in Chowchilla, California, on July 15, 1976, when kidnappers abducted 26 children and their adult driver from their school bus and imprisoned them in a buried truck. The driver, Frank Edward "Ed" Ray, was able to free the children, and the kidnappers were caught and convicted.

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## Kidnapping and escape

Chowchilla was launched into national headlines on July 15, 1976, when 26 children and an adult bus driver were kidnapped from their bus. The kidnappers hid the bus in a drainage slough, and drove the children and bus driver around in two vans for 11 hours before forcing them to climb into a hole in the ground. After passing through the hole, the children and their driver found themselves trapped in the interior of a buried moving van. Although they did not know it, their place of confinement was in a quarry located in Livermore, California.

Local farmer and part-time bus driver Ed Ray, with help from some of the boys, stacked the 14 mattresses that were in the van. This enabled some of the older children to reach the opening at the top of the truck, which had been covered with a metal lid and weighed down with two 100-pound industrial batteries. They wedged the lid open with a stick, Ray moved the batteries, and then they removed the remainder of the debris blocking the entrance. After 16 hours underground, they emerged and walked to the guard shack at the entrance to the quarry. The guard alerted the authorities, all the victims were pronounced in good condition, and they returned home to find that the mass media had descended on the town.

## Investigation and arrests

Ray was able to remember the license plate number of one vehicle under hypnosis, which led to the capture of the kidnappers as they attempted to flee to Canada. A rough draft of a ransom note was found at the house of the owner of the quarry. The owner's son, Frederick Newhall Woods, IV, and two friends, Richard and James Schoenfeld, were found guilty and sentenced to life in prison.<sup>[1]</sup>

After the children were recovered, it was observed that some circumstances of the abduction corresponded to details in "The Day the Children Vanished", a story written by Hugh Pentecost that had been published in the 1969 fiction anthology *Alfred Hitchcock's Daring Detectives*. A copy of this book was in the Chowchilla public library; police theorized that this was the real-life kidnappers' inspiration.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Incarceration

After being denied parole 20 times, one of the three kidnappers, Richard Schoenfeld, was deemed suitable for parole by the California Board on Parole Hearings on October 30, 2008. Richard Schoenfeld was released on June 20, 2012 and is living with his mother in a condominium complex in Mountain View, California.<sup>[3]</sup>

James Schoenfeld was denied parole for the 17th time on March 13, 2013. He will be eligible for parole again in 3 years. Frederick Woods denied parole for the 13th time on November 28, 2012 and will not be eligible again until 2015.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Bus driver

Frank Edward "Ed" Ray (February 26, 1921 – May 17, 2012) graduated from Chowchilla High School in 1940. After working on a small

farm, Ray began driving a bus in the early 1950s. After the kidnapping, the town celebrated Ed Ray and Children's Day with a parade, and Governor Jerry Brown awarded Ray a 1976 California School Employees Association citation for outstanding community service.<sup>[5]</sup> Ray died at a Chowchilla nursing home of cirrhosis of the liver, at the age of 91.<sup>[6]</sup> In the days before he died, he was visited by many of the children whom he helped save.<sup>[7]</sup>

## After effects

Three years after the kidnapping, a study of 23 of the children by Dr. Lenore C. Terr of UC San Francisco concluded that they had been traumatized by the ordeal, resulting in panic attacks, nightmares of kidnappings leading to their deaths, and personality changes. Twenty of the children were afraid of being kidnapped again, and 21 were afraid of such things as "cars, the dark, the wind, the kitchen, mice, dogs and hippies."<sup>[8]</sup> Eighteen months after the kidnapping, one of the older male victims shot a Japanese tourist with a BB gun when the tourist's car broke down in front of his home in what Dr. Terr described as "a dangerously inappropriate episode of (his need for) heroism."<sup>[9]</sup> Many of the children continued to report symptoms of trauma at least 25 years after the kidnapping, including substance abuse and depression. According to Dr. Terr, a number have spent time in prison for "doing something controlling to somebody else."<sup>[10]</sup>

## Media adaptations

The ordeal was dramatized in the 1993 ABC-TV movie *They've Taken Our Children: The Chowchilla Kidnapping* (shown in the UK as *Vanished Without a Trace*) starring Karl Malden as Ray. Woods subsequently sued the network, alleging their portrayal of him was false and misleading, but the case was dismissed.<sup>[11]</sup>

Interviews with many of the children, now adults, as well as the bus driver, have been broadcast on MSNBC.

The TV series *Without a Trace* ran an episode called "The Bus" in which a bus full of children is hijacked for ransom in a manner similar to the Chowchilla incident.

## See also

- 2013 Alabama bunker hostage crisis

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## School bus is hijacked suspect slain

Disabled children used as shields in Fla. chase

November 03, 1995 | By NEWYORKTIMES NEWS SERVICE

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. -- A man saying he had a bomb hijacked a school bus yesterday morning with 13 disabled children on board and led the police on a 25-mile, low-speed chase from suburban Dade County, through downtown Miami and finally to the front door of a famous Miami Beach restaurant, where officers shot and killed him.

Except for one student who was slightly injured by glass shattered in the shooting, the children and adults on the bus were unharmed.

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The police said they shot the hijacker in the doorway of the bus in an effort to rescue the children, who at times during the chase were used by the hijacker as a shield as he sat on the bus floor.

But for most of the ordeal, school officials said, the children stayed in their seats, following the directions of the driver, Alicia Chapman, who told them that there was nothing to be upset about and that they all should take a nap.

Within seconds of the shooting, the police officers, members of a special hostage rescue team who recently had trained for a scenario involving a hijacked school bus, dragged the hijacker's body away from the bus and pulled the children from its rear emergency exit and into the restaurant, Joe's Stone Crab.

Police said they knew of no motive for the hijacking, but Fred Taylor, director of the Miami-Dade Police Department, told reporters that the hijacker had been having financial troubles and that he owed thousands of dollars in taxes to the government.

Employees at Joe's Stone Crab said the hijacker, whom they identified as Catalino "Nick" Sang, had worked there as a waiter. The restaurant's general manager said Sang had announced last night that he was quitting, effective immediately.

The manager, Robert Moorehead, said Sang gave no reason for leaving the restaurant, where he had worked for more than seven years.

Waiters interviewed at the restaurant said that Sang had been under a lot of stress, working full time there while trying to cope with his duties at two takeout Chinese restaurants that he owned in Dade County.

The hijacker, whose body was left splayed on its back in an alley behind the restaurant through the afternoon, was later identified by the police as Sang. He was 42, police said.

Some of the children who had been held hostage on the bus are mentally retarded; others have severe learning disabilities and still others are "nonverbal," said Octavio Visiedo, the superintendent of Dade County schools. As such, he said, they might not have been completely aware of what was happening to them. But Mr. Visiedo, who visited with the students at the scene, said some seemed "nervous."

After the shooting, police carried the children into the restaurant, where the officers, school board officials and restaurant employees comforted them and served them ice cream.

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Another school bus then picked up the students and took them " to their school, Blue Lakes Elementary, about 10 miles southwest of downtown Miami, where they were met by their parents and counseled by a crisis intervention unit.

During the ordeal, police said, the hijacker was in touch with the authorities on a cellular telephone that he had demanded and received from a highway patrol officer. The hijacker told hostage negotiators that he had a bomb, which he threatened to detonate.

Police later determined that there was no bomb, only a piece of medical equipment – part of a respirator, the police said – that the hijacker apparently took from one of the children on the bus. Police said they found no gun.

During the chase, which was broadcast on television, the hijacker first demanded to be taken to the offices of the Internal Revenue Service. But when hostage negotiators told him that the bus had already passed that exit on the Palmetto Expressway, he changed his destination to Joe's Stone Crab, said Sgt. Ralph Fernandez of the Metro-Dade police, whose officers shot the hijacker.

Police said the incident began at 8:30 a.m. at a school bus stop, when a man pushed his way onto the Dade County school bus as a mother helped two children to board.

Mr. Taylor said witnesses told the police that only moments before, the man had entered a church near the bus stop where he had become "hysterical."

On board were 13 elementary school children in special education programs, and three adults: the driver, a bus aide and the mother.

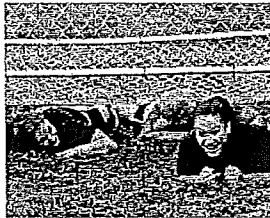
At the news conference, Mr. Taylor said a pedestrian realized that the bus was being hijacked and called the police, who immediately gave chase.

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Oct 17, 2013

## Knife-wielding man hijacks Arkansas school bus

By Daniella Silva, NBC News  
November 8, 2013, 10:15 am

NBCNews.com

A man armed with a knife took 11 elementary school children and their bus driver hostage in Jacksonville, Ark. Thursday morning during a carjacking that ended in an approximately ten-mile chase, police said.

Fortunately, no one was injured in the incident and "all 11 children are safe and with their parents," said April Kiser, a spokeswoman for the Jacksonville Police Department.

Jacksonville Police said Nicholas John Miller, 22, a resident of the city, was on North First Street at around 7 a.m. Thursday morning when he demanded a car from a woman walking along the street knifepoint, but the woman did not have a car to give him.

Miller then turned to a elementary school bus that had made a routine stop at a nearby apartment complex, Jacksonville Police Captain Kenny Boyd said. Knife in hand, Miller got on the bus and made the driver flee the scene before taking over driver's seat himself.



Courtesy Jacksonville Police Department  
Suspect Nicholas John Miller

"The bus would not stop so the pursuit lasted for about eight to ten miles," Capt. Boyd said, noting that the bus was driving between 30 and 50 miles per hour.

Spike strips were deployed by another Arkansas police department assisting in the chase, Capt. Boyd said. Miller stopped the bus when he saw the spikes and was taken into custody by police at Highway 5 and Mountain Springs Road in Cabot, Ark.

Miller told police "there were people after him, and the only way to get away was to hijack the bus," according to the Jacksonville Police Department arrest report.

He also told police he had no plans to hurt the children or the bus driver and "he just needed to take the bus to save his life." Miller consented to his blood being drawn, but refused to take a breath test or to let a Drug Recognition Officer interview him, according to the report.

Miller was charged with one count of vehicle piracy, 12 counts of kidnapping, and two counts of aggravated assault and several traffic violations, Jacksonville police said.

According to police records, Miller has been arrested several times this year.

He was arrested for breaking and entering of a vehicle in May, after breaking into a man's car and stealing \$400 and a Sherwood Police Department issued shotgun, while leaving another knife behind. Miller was found with the shotgun and pleaded guilty to the charges.

Last month he was sentenced to 24 months probation and a fine of \$1,500, according to Pulaski County Circuit Court records.

Miller was also pulled over on Sept. 6 by police for improper display of tabs on the vehicle he was driving.

Officers then discovered Miller had a warrant out for his arrest and conducted a search, finding a syringe with residue in the vehicle. Miller was arrested on the warrant and charged with possession of drug paraphernalia. He went to court for the charges and was released.

And earlier this month on Oct. 8, police were called to residence where Miller was charged with terroristic threatening in a domestic dispute, records show. The charges were subsequently dropped and Miller was not arrested.

AP

Jan 31, 13



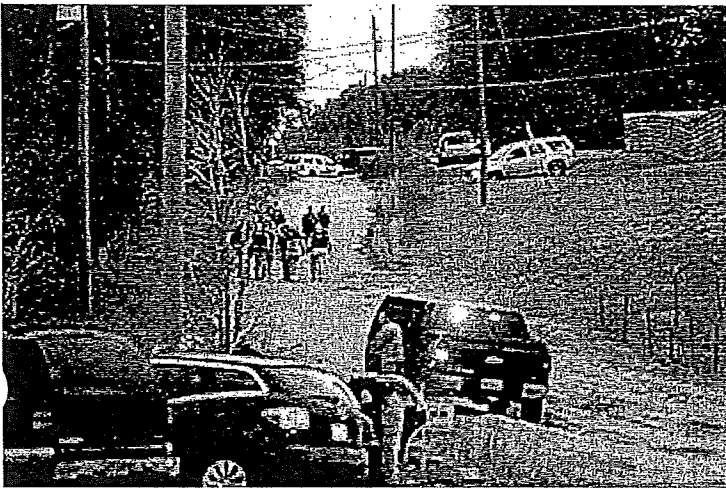
# The Big Story

## Standoff: Ala. gunman holed up with kidnapped boy

By PHILLIP RAWLS

— Jan. 31, 2013 12:47 AM EST

Home » Alabama » Standoff: Ala. gunman holed up with kidnapped boy



In this Tuesday, Jan 29, 2013 photo, law enforcement officers walk up the road toward a home where a school bus shooting suspect was hiding inside a bunker late Tuesday. Police, SWAT teams and negotiators were at a rural property where a man was believed to be holed up in a homemade bunker Wednesday, JAN 30, 2013 after fatally shooting the driver of a school bus and fleeing with a 6-year-old child passenger, authorities said. The man boarded the stopped school bus in the town of Midland City on Tuesday afternoon and shot the driver when he refused to let the child off the bus. The bus driver died. (AP Photo/The Dothan Eagle, Danny Tindell)

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MIDLAND CITY, Ala. (AP) — A gunman holed up in a bunker with a 5-year-old hostage kept law officers at bay Wednesday in an all-night, all-day standoff that began when he killed a school bus driver and dragged the boy away, authorities said.

SWAT teams took up positions around the gunman's rural property and police negotiators tried to win the kindergartener's safe release.

The situation remained unchanged late Wednesday, with negotiations ongoing, Alabama State Trooper Charles Dysart told a news conference. He said no additional information would be released until Thursday morning.

The gunman, identified by neighbors as Jimmy Lee Dykes, a 65-year-old retired truck driver, was known around the neighborhood as a menacing figure who once beat a dog to death with a lead pipe, threatened to shoot children for setting foot on his property and patrolled his yard at night with a flashlight and a shotgun.

He had been scheduled to appear in court Wednesday morning to answer charges he shot at his neighbors in a dispute last month over a speed bump.

The standoff along a red dirt road began on Tuesday afternoon, after a gunman boarded a stopped school bus filled with children in the town of Midland

City, population 2,300. Sheriff Wally Olson said the man shot the bus driver when he refused to hand over a 5-year-old child. The gunman then took the boy away.

far as we know there is no relation at all. He just wanted a child for a hostage situation," said Michael Senn, a pastor who helped comfort the traumatized children after the attack.

Authorities initially said the boy was 6, but state Rep. Steve Clouse, who visited the boy's family, said he does not turn 6 until next week.

The bus driver, Charles Albert Poland Jr., 66, was hailed by locals as a hero who gave his life to protect 21 students.

The boy's classmates, their parents and other members of this small Bible Belt community gathered in several churches and held a candlelight vigil in the town square Wednesday evening to pray for Poland and for the boy's safety. Some in the square joined together to sing "Amazing Grace."

Authorities gave no details on the standoff, and it was unclear if Dykes made any demands from his underground bunker, which resembled a tornado shelter.

The sheriff said in a brief statement Wednesday evening that negotiators continued talking to the suspect and "at this time we have no reason to believe that the child has been harmed."

About 50 vehicles from federal, state and local agencies were clustered at the end of a dirt road near where Dykes lived in a small travel trailer. Nearby homes were evacuated after authorities found what was believed to be a bomb on his property.

Clouse, who also has met with authorities, said the bunker had food and electricity, and the youngster was watching TV. He said law enforcement authorities were communicating with the gunman, but he had no details on how.

At one point, authorities lowered medicine into the bunker for the boy after his captor agreed to it, Clouse said. The lawmaker said he did not know what the medicine was for or whether it was urgently needed.

Chris Voss, a former international kidnapping negotiator for the FBI, said negotiators at the scene should remain patient and calm, resisting the urge to see a quick resolution.

"Getting what you want is not the same as getting even," said Voss, whose firm, the Black Swan Group, now consults on high-stakes negotiations. "Flooding the zone will not save lives."

Mike and Patricia Smith, who live across the street from Dykes and whose two children were on the bus when the shooting happened, said their youngsters had a run-in with him about 10 months ago.

"My bulldogs got loose and went over there," Patricia Smith said. "The children went to get them. He threatened to shoot them if they came back."

"He's very paranoid," her husband said. "He goes around in his yard at night with a flashlight and shotgun."

Patricia Smith said her children told her what happened on the bus: Two other children had just been dropped off and the Smith children were next. Dykes stepped onto the bus and grabbed the door so the driver couldn't close it. Dykes told the driver he wanted two boys, 6 to 8 years old, without saying why.

According to Smith, Dykes started down the aisle of the bus and the driver put his arm out to block him. Dykes fired four shots at Poland with a handgun, Smith said.

"He did give his life, saving children," Mike Smith said.

Patricia Smith said her daughter, a high school senior, began corralling the other children and headed for the back of the bus while Dykes and the driver were arguing. Later, Smith's son ran inside his house, telling his mother: "The crazy man across the street shot the bus driver and Mr. Poland won't wake up."

Patricia Smith ran over to the bus and saw the driver slumped over in his seat. Her daughter used another child's cellphone to call 911.

Another neighbor, Ronda Wilbur, said Dykes beat her 120-pound dog with a lead pipe for coming onto his side of the dirt road. The dog died a week later.

"He said his only regret was he didn't beat him to death all the way," Wilbur said. "If a man can kill a dog, and beat it with a lead pipe and brag about it,



it's nothing until it's going to be people."

Dykes had been scheduled to appear in court Wednesday to face a charge of menacing some neighbors as they drove by his house weeks ago. Media Davis said he yelled and fired shots at her, her son and her baby grandson over damage Dykes claimed their pickup truck did to a makeshift ed bump in the dirt road. No one was hurt.

"Before this happened, I would see him at several places and he would just stare a hole through me," Davis said. "On Monday I saw him at a laundromat and he seen me when I was getting in my truck, and he just stared and stared and stared at me."

Associated Press writers Melissa Nelson-Gabriel in Midland City, Bob Johnson in Montgomery, and Jay Reeves in Birmingham contributed to this report.

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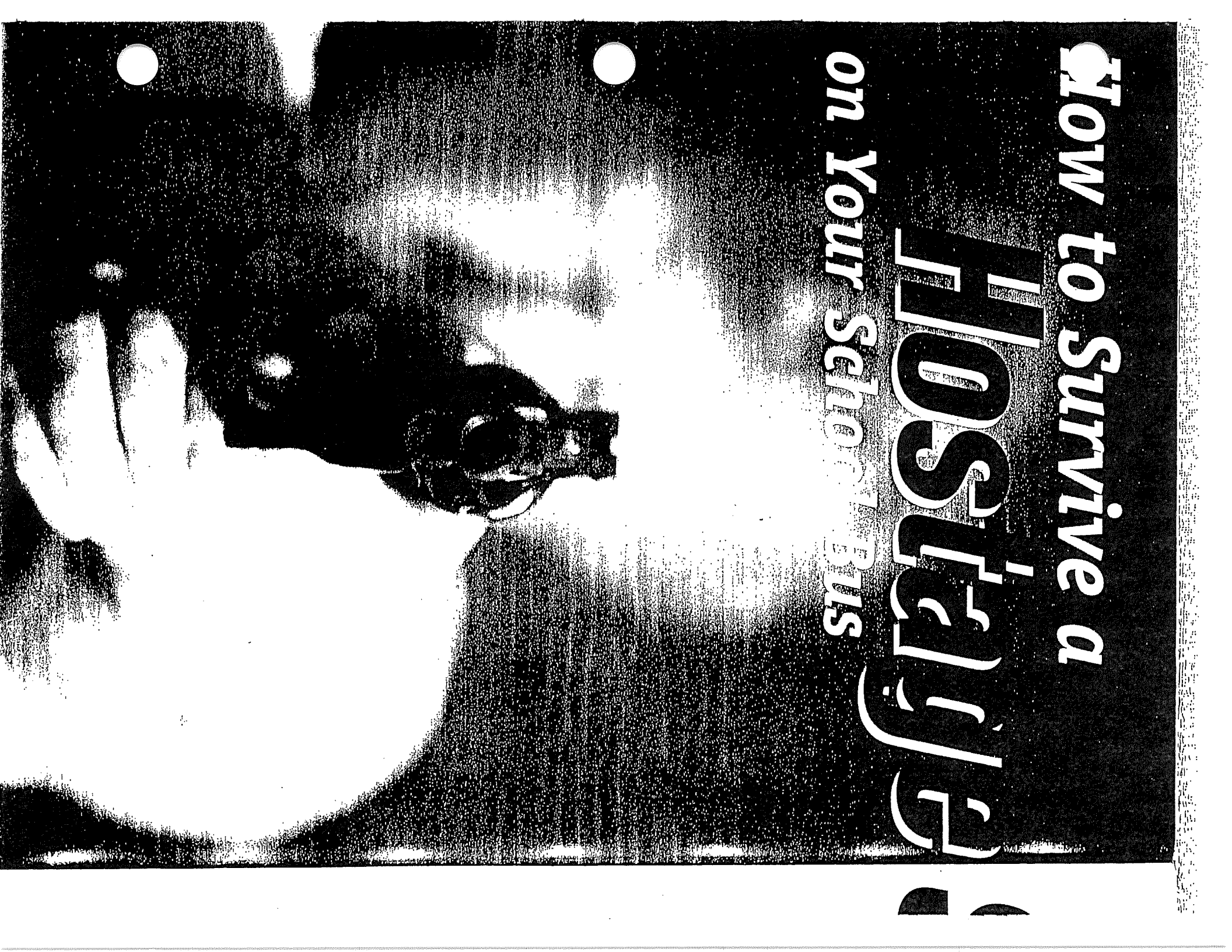
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## Comments

**How to Survive a  
Hostile  
on Your School Bus**



# Situation

Sure, chances are slim that you'll be held hostage, but you should be prepared for a worst-case scenario.

By Tim Parker

# T

he threat of terrorism is never far from home. The bombing in Oklahoma City has become a symbol of the senseless taking of life that can erupt in any city, town or backwater in America.

Federal buildings are not the only likely targets. The school bus could also find itself in the crosshairs. It is more visible and accessible than airliners, trains or government buildings. And it remains a symbol of this country's future.

Who are the aggressors that we may face? While terrorists could plot to hijack a school bus, more likely it will be a troubled student, a disgruntled employee or former employee or an estranged spouse of an employee.

The Fairfax County (Va.) Office of Transportation Services and the Fairfax County Police Department have been planning, training and practicing for hostage situations — just in case — for several years.

Chances are slim that this will ever happen, but there are some basic survival tips that may help school bus drivers and attendants in the event of such an emergency.

The following advice is offered to help school bus drivers survive a hostage situation and is intended to inform — not to cause unnecessary alarm or concern.

## First, do no harm

Your main objective is to prevent anyone from getting hurt. Consider the consequences of your action or inaction before you cause additional risk for you or your passengers.

In this case, patience is a virtue. This is easier to say than do, but remember that your passengers are looking to you for guidance. If you show patience, your passengers will be more prone to follow your lead. If you become hysterical, panic will spread.

Know that 99 percent of hostage situations are resolved through negotiation. This process may take time, but time is on your side.

## Maintain a calm exterior

Although you may be quaking inside, try not to show fear. Again, children are looking to your example.

Know that police are very concerned for you and your passengers' safety, but they may purposely not ask how you are doing as this may serve to reinforce the hostage-taker's actions.

Do not put yourself or passengers at additional risk by initiating aggressive actions. This is not the time to be a "hero," except in preventing harm to yourself and your passengers. This is not TV or the movies. The dangers are too real for you to take an unnecessary risk.

## Stay in contact

Try to advise police and/or supervisors on your location and situation as soon as possible if the hostage-taker has not made contact.

If the hostage-taker has already made contact, try to use special emergency radio codes. Also, try to keep the microphone "keyed open." This might allow a dispatcher to piece together what is happening.

Be aware that many radios have what is called a "time-out timer." This feature will cause the radio to stop transmitting if the microphone button is depressed for long periods. This prevents a malfunctioning radio or a talkative driver from dominating a radio channel.

**D**o not put yourself or passengers at additional risk by initiating aggressive actions.

Most radios with this feature are set to stop transmitting after about three minutes of continuous transmission. If your radio has this feature, you'll have to release and rekey the microphone every few minutes. This will help ensure that your transmission gets through.

## How to help police

Try to help police see what is going on inside the bus or building where you are detained. Turning on interior lights, opening windows or opening a door can aid police in seeing what is happening inside.

The pretense could be to let more air into the bus. The advantage is the police have a much better view and possible access to you.



Author Tim Parker is assistant transportation director at Fairfax County (Va.) Public Schools.

Also, unlatch or open the service door if possible. An unlatched door is easier for police to force open if necessary.

Make a mental picture of the hostage-taker(s) and any weapons or other information that might help police. It is possible that some hostages may be released earlier than others as part of the negotiation process. Take note of any information that you can share with police if you are released before others. You may prefer to remain with your passengers, but you may not have the choice.

## Cooperate, within reason

Cooperate with your captor and do as you are told. Make phone or radio calls if asked. You should comply with reasonable demands

**I**f you have the opportunity to position the bus upon your arrival, try to avoid parking in the open.

but do not offer to help.

If you are told to drive your bus to a particular location, follow your captor's instructions. However, if you have the opportunity to position the bus upon your arrival, try to avoid parking in the open. Instead, park near large objects such as buildings or other vehicles that block the captor's view.

## How to Prepare Your Drivers

Last fall, the transportation department at Fairfax County Public Schools began to present information to all school bus drivers on how to deal with hostage-taking situations. But actual drills and role-playing scenarios with the SWAT team have involved a relatively small number of staff members.

It's difficult to involve 1,200-plus drivers in role-playing drills with police. We are looking into possibly adding a role-playing activity in the classroom, but police would not be involved.

We have also added a hidden air release valve on our new buses to allow police to open the air-operated entrance door with greater ease. —Tim Parker

Better positioning of the bus may help police get closer to you without being seen.

If police try to enter the bus or building where you are being held, avoid giving away their position or actions by your reactions. Changes in your facial expression alone could cause the captor to be suspicious.

Be prepared for loud noises or shouting to distract or instruct captors as the police approach. If you are in a bus with air brakes, the police may release the air from the system rapidly to prevent the bus from moving or to aid in gaining access or to create a distraction.

In any case, the quick release of air is extremely loud. There could even be gunfire to distract or suppress the captor.

## Avoid the situation

It helps to know what to do if your bus is put in a hostage situation, but it's best not to allow yourself to end up in such a situation.

Here are a few tips on how to avoid hostage situations:

- Report any suspicious persons immediately. Do not wait for something to happen or get out of control.
- Safeguard your keys. It is harder for someone to enter or move your bus if you have the keys under your control.
- Supervisors should retrieve keys from terminated employees.
- If you are involved in a domestic dispute or have an order of protection against someone, be sure you take action to protect yourself while

on your bus and while en route to the compound.

- Alert your supervisors to the situation or dispute and provide them with a photo of the person if he or she is prone to violence.

- Let neighbors, co-workers or your landlord know that you may be in danger and that they should call police if they hear or see anything suspicious.

- Know what looks normal and not normal at your workplace.

- If you suspect a hostage crisis is about to occur, evacuate or remove the bus and passengers from the area and call police.

## Know your passengers

Your familiarity with your passengers and their needs can be vital in such emergencies, especially if a student has medical needs that could become acute if he or she is not delivered to school or home for treatment. This might also serve as a reason for your captor to allow communication to emergency support.

If a student is the hijacker, your personal knowledge and relationship with the student could be helpful in safely resolving the situation. Better still, your knowledge or identification of a student's problem might get them assistance before the situation escalates.

For more information on how to deal with hostage situations, contact your local law enforcement agency. **SBF**

Information in this article was collected from the Fairfax County Police Department through interviews and handout materials.

Circle 111 on SBF Action Card —