

EPISODE 477

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[00:00:00] AH: Welcome to this week's episode of SpyCast. This week's guest is a former Marine, his mission is quite simple, to prepare you to win, in the worst 15 seconds of the worst day of your life. While on his second tour in Afghanistan, Rob Montgomery received a motion detect from a camera back home, in a quiet college town in Virginia. What he saw was very concerning indeed. Unidentified men were poised outside his home, one of them with a flashlight that looked like it could be on a handgun. To give you full context, it was 4:30 in the morning, and his wife and children were asleep inside.

You'll need to listen to hear how the story ends, but it will be well worth your while. Rob is an Operations Officer in the CIA for 34 years. He served in some of the most austere and dangerous places on our planet. He's a self-defense expert, and author of *Seconds to Live or Die*. Rob and I talked about CIA training, situational awareness, Krav Maga, and whether or not you need to go bag. One of the chapters in the book discusses a go bag. So, I guess the first question would be, should everybody have a go bag?

[00:01:24] RM: Well, probably no, not everybody needs a go bag. But in the worst 15 seconds of the worst day of your life, you don't want to be left wanting. So, the go bag was something I threw into the book, simply because it's one of the things that I've used over my career. Obviously, if you're working overseas someplace, and you have to worry about bombs and explosions and things like that, it's nice to have something that you can just grab and go. Working overseas, it's just a nice thing to have. It's just another little step of preparation for the worst-case scenario without being paranoid about it, I suppose.

[00:02:03] AH: It's a nice little insurance policy.

[00:02:05] RM: I got to tell you, I wasn't expecting that to be the first question but good.

[00:02:13] AH: I mean, I think your listeners would love to know what you had in your go bag if you can share.

[00:02:17] RM: Oh, yeah, sure. So, I have a go bag in my car as we speak, and you tailor it to your environment. So, I now live in Virginia, and it's a nice and quiet environment. I don't ever hope or intend to have to use that go bag. But in a worst-case scenario, maybe you get stuck out in traffic or something unexpected, every once in a while, we get a tornado or what have you. So, the go bag, just as a basic medical kit, I have flashlight, a few dollars, an emergency blanket. That would be a very different go bag than one that I would have in Afghanistan, say which would have ammunition and multiple means of communication and compasses and maps and things like that. So, you kind of tailor it to your environment.

[00:03:01] AH: Were there times when the Coronavirus first started where you thought, well, maybe I'm going to need quite soon? All the food shortages –

[00:03:10] RM: I'll tell you, it was a strange time, wasn't it? I look back at this past year and just kind of scratch my head. I don't think maybe it's another intelligence failure. I could never would have imagined that the situation would have worked out the way it did.

[00:03:24] AH: So, tell us a little bit more about your book. So, *Seconds to Live or Die*, what is your book doing? Why did you write it?

[00:03:24] RM: So, it happened because of an event that happened to my family. I was going out to Afghanistan for a second tour. And in the run up to any kind of deployment like that. there's always a million to one different things that an officer has to do. You've got to take care of the will. You got to make sure the insurance is up to date and make sure the bills are going to get paid while you're gone. That your spouse knows where all the important papers are, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. There's mandatory training that you have to go through. That's always a pain in the neck because it's like the last thing you want to do when you're trying to say goodbye to friends and family and take care of all these other issues.

One of the things that we did in like two days before I left was, I'd mentioned that to my son that I wanted to run a drill for my wife and my family on what to do if they ever had a home intrusion type of scenario. Now, I live in a beautiful neighborhood in a small town, a college town. Never really envisioned something like this would be necessary. But two days before we were down to

Costco, and I bought a couple of cameras, I set one up in my back deck and one out of my garage. My oldest son who was an Army Lieutenant at the time was like, "Hey, Dad, you got to do this drill." So, I'm like, "Yeah, you're right. Let's do it."

So, we did a simple drill and I walked my wife through what would you do if in the night something happened? Where's the gun? Where's the ammunition? Where are you going to stand? What are we going to do with the kids? We had three little ones at that time and a teenager. What's the teenager going to do? He knows how to shoot. Should we have him manage the kids? Do we give them a gun, blah, blah, blah? Took about 20 minutes of goofing around and not really taking it so seriously, but kind of walking through it.

Well, fast forward six months, and I'm in Afghanistan. Of course, the time zone difference is quite significant. I come out of the – I used to exercise at lunch. I come out of the shower at lunchtime, after exercising and I have an iPhone. I'm way out in a remote area, but we had internet connection. So, on my iPhone, I see there's a motion detect on one of the cameras, the one at the garage. And when I look, it's 4:30 in the morning, here in Virginia, and I see a Caucasian male and he's dressed with a backpack, his collars up. He has a baseball hat, and gloves, and he's using the light of his camera to look into my garage.

So, I'm like, "Man, who's that? Could that possibly be my 17-year-old?" So, after ascertaining that it was not my 17-year-old, a moment later, though, I get a second motion detect. Now, I have a black male on my deck and he's dressed the exact same way, the backpack, gloves, and he's using a flashlight that looks like it could be on a handgun looking into my playroom. So, now I really get alarmed and FaceTime my wife. I call her up. She gets a call at 4:30 in the morning from Afghanistan. She's expecting the worst. And I'm like, "No, actually, it's bad news for you. I want you to look at the cameras. I see two guys outside."

So, she looks and she goes, "Yeah, I can see them." So, I'm like, "Okay, go get the shotgun, load it. Tell me when you have it." So, she goes, "Okay." Now, we only shot this thing one time, at a friend's property before I left. So, I hear her fussing with a shotgun. She comes back, she goes, "I'm having trouble loading it." So, I'm like, "All right, forget the shotgun. Go get the Glock, pistol, rack it one time. Tell me when you have it." She was more familiar with that, because he had shot at half dozen times. So, she racks the pistol and she comes back she's utterly cool,

calm and collected, just amazed at her composure. She goes, "Okay, I got it." I'm like, "Great. Go down the hall, just like we talked. Grab the teenager, stand in the doorway of the kid's room. Call 911 speak slowly and clearly. So, they understand your accent and if anybody comes up the stairs, shoot him." She goes, "Okay." Off she goes.

So, meanwhile, the seconds are ticking by and it feels like an eternity. So, as I'm waiting, I get another motion detect now I got two black males on the back deck and I can see them testing each window and trying to door and I still got the guy down by the garage. So, I'm going crazy. So, I thought maybe I can just call the local police from where I'm at. So, I look up on the internet, how to make the international call from far out Afghanistan, get the number, call and I say, "Look, I'm in Afghanistan and my wife's home." They go, "You're what? You're where?" That took two minutes of explanation. "I'm out of the house." They said, "What's your address?" I give them the address. They go, "Oh, that's the county police's jurisdiction. Wait one moment while we transfer your call." So, going crazy. The call goes through, "What's your emergency?" This time I leave out the part about being in Afghanistan. "My wife's home alone, I can see these guys." And they go, "Oh, yeah, we got officers on the scene." I'm like, "That's fantastic. Did you catch anybody?" The answer is no, they did not catch anybody.

But what had happened was the guy down by the garage had noticed a camera which was up to his left and he must have informed the others because I saw him grab that camera and I saw the camera go across the street and wind up in the neighbor's bushes. So, the police just missed them. So, my wife did everything, just absolutely brilliantly and she's never had any training at all other than me walking through the hallway whether talking to her. Just a little bit of forethought and minor planning made all the difference, as opposed to waking up at 4:30 and not knowing what to do. So, when I thought about that, I thought, over the course of my career, I've been very fortunate to have had a lot of good training, a lot of tips on how to live overseas and whatnot. So, why not share some of that, kind of put that all together and share it for primarily my family. I have daughters and young kids. I have six kids. So, I wanted it for them essentially. That's how the book came about and I was lucky enough to, when I first retired, I was working overseas in Saudi Arabia for a defense contractor and I was waiting for the contract to kick off, I had the time. Nope, I didn't have the six kids in the house. So yeah, that was a good time to write the book.

[00:09:49] AH: In the book, you show some stills from that event that you have just described and you also say that you fantasize about being there. Could you tell us more about that?

[00:10:00] RM: I mean, anybody that's ever been a victim of crime and chances are we all have at some point or another or lost something or the car broken into or what have you. And you just relive in your mind is like, "Oh Lord, I wish I had been home when those guys had been there." I have no doubt that my wife would have shot them had they come up the stairs. The thing is that she's such a gentle person. Literally, when if she sees the fly, she's about to hit the fly, she'll apologize to it and say, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry." And then she'll hit it, and I'm like, "Why do you say that?" She goes, "Well, the fly wanted to live to."

So, that's the type of person she is, and yet when it came to crunch time, and I think her maternal instincts kicking in, she did everything right. Of course, in our profession, we're gone so much of our lives, working lives, out of the house, on trips, and overseas and war zones, or what have you. You regret missing only the birthdays and the good times, but you regret not being there for the bad times.

[00:10:56] AH: I can empathize with that because my sister, her husband works away and he was away on the oil rigs, and someone broke into my sister's house. Well, we think it was a couple of people, went up the stairs and took the keys for the car, from her bedside table. She was sleeping in the bed with my niece, and then never woke up. I've often fantasized about being there when it happens and they walk in the door and then the last thing to hear is a shotgun cocking.

[00:11:28] RM: Absolutely, I'm with you on that fantasy. I got that 100%, 110% for sure.

[00:11:34] AH: That sounds like she had what Napoleon said is the rarest form of courage, which is three o'clock in the morning courage, where you wake up during the night and there's something that you're completely unprepared for, but you still have the nerve to deal with it rather than something that you're psyching yourself up for.

[00:11:51] RM: That's correct. Again, I think even a few minutes of forethought can some kind of plan can make all the difference. Because when we're under stress, we can't think and when

fear is knocking on the door, you can't think. When your heart's beating so fast and if it gets above 200 beats per minute, you can't think at all. That's where the animal mind comes in and people panic, blind panic and things of that nature. So, that brings me to part of the discussion in the book was dealing with fear. We've all had multiple times in our lives. If you understand that, if when some event happens, a car crash that you walk up upon, and suddenly your heart starts beating faster. A resting heart rates about 60 to 100 beats per minute and that's where we can philosophize and come up with wonderful, wonderful things and thoughts. Dave Grossman, the author of *On Killing*, talks about once it gets – the heart rate gets up to like 115, 145, that's kind of an optimal time, that's when you're alert, you're a little bit tensed, nervous, but alert and really able – that's where a soldier can really maximize his performance.

But if we're standing here, and a bomb goes off, 10 meters away, now we go from resting heart rate to 200 beats plus a minute in the proverbial heartbeat and now we can't think. But if you understand those mechanics of the body, then you stand a chance of controlling it or bringing it down and really the key there is breathing. And whether we talk about, new named a sport, or martial arts or yoga, or baseball, basketball, shooting, whatever it is, it's all about breath control. If you can understand that, okay, I just went from resting heart rate to 200 plus, now I need you to breathe, and bring that heart rate down, that'll get you through when we encounter violence. We go through this matrix in our head where we go through denial. I can't believe this is happening to decision, what should I do? And then action.

Now, that could happen in fractions of a second, or it could happen over hours, and you never get to the action, like some of the poor victims of 9/11 who sat in the towers for hours, only to not survive. So, we want to get through that decision loop as quickly as possible. Being able to understand how our bodies work, when fear impacts us to bring the heart rate down to now be able to get to that action is really the key. Obviously, easier said than done. But if you can think about it, then you stand a chance, a greater chance of doing it when it really matters.

[00:14:30] AH: In the book, you speak a lot about the types of training that you received and the way that the CIA are very effective at giving people situational awareness. I guess my question was, to what extent is this nature and to what extent is this nature? Could you do some kind of TV transformation where you take, again, a kind of scary-cat and make them like after three o'clock in the morning courage, or is that something people are born with?

[00:14:56] RM: I think so. I think you can work towards that. When my son was going to college and he was going to a City University. And I was worried about because he was living off campus and it was not a great part of town. So, I went up there one day with him and said, “Okay, we're going to walk now to school.” And as we walk, number one, don't look at your phone. Number two, don't wear earbuds or headphones. I'm going to sidetrack for a minute here, but I heard a story about a woman who was hiking in the wilderness on the Appalachian Trail and she was listening to music on her headphones, a bear came running out of the woods, not at her, but I was just running for God knows what reason, it actually knocked her over. She had no idea because she was wearing headphones. So, how she didn't wind up on the menu that day, is a miracle. So, the same thing applies for human beings, when we're walking among the most dangerous creatures in the world, other men, why would you want to deprive yourself of senses like being able to hear or being able to see because you're focused on the phone.

So, number one, digital things. Number two, as we're walking, I would just point out things to him. “Okay. Look, you see that alleyway, makes me a little bit uncomfortable, we're just going to step out closer to the street as we cross it. You see that guy over there, I don't like the way he's standing there, just cross the street, it doesn't mean you're any less of a man, or you're not macho or whatever. It just means that you're taking precaution. If he happens to take notice of you across the street too, now you've got a couple of split seconds to maybe decide what you need to do.”

The *Gift of Fear* is a book that I love and it goes into that in some detail about listening to your instincts. So, I think that yes, it is possible to train people. The problem is you don't want to be so utterly paranoid that you go down the street, you can't maintain that. You go down the street, and you're afraid of everything. That's not what I'm advocating. What I am advocating is just paying attention. For a woman, for example, coming to your car. This is where so many women wind up getting attacked as they're getting in and out of their cars. So, your vigilance should go up as you're approaching the car. If a man comes up to you and ask you for the time, your antenna should definitely go way up at that point, because who doesn't have access to time in this day and age? That kind of vigilance can – it's an ounce of prevention that could save your life.

[00:17:30] AH: Talk to us a little bit more about the notion of 15 seconds.

[00:17:34] RM: I plagiarized that phrase from a martial arts instructor named Chris Ranck-Buhr. He's the creator of injury dynamics, which I also cover in my book. But really, 15 seconds, basically what I'm simply saying is, when violence strikes us, it happens super fast. Probably 15 seconds is way too much time. If you're at the ATM and you get mugged for your money, it's going to happen literally in three or four seconds by somebody who has no empathy for another human being. So, this is what we want to prevent by being vigilant. If we ever have to fight for our lives, really, you're going to have those few seconds to do it. At that point, really, it becomes animal instincts and no mercy. So, that's where empathetic human beings and we go around the world and we're happy and we're friendly, and we love our families and children and we participate in the church and what have you. But in those 15 seconds if you need to, you've got to be able to switch it on so that you can deal with the threat, and that means to deal with the threat as quickly and violently as possible.

[00:18:42] AH: There's a great quote in the book where you say, "If you're fighting fear, then you're not planning properly." Could you talk more about that?

[00:18:51] RM: Yeah. That comes from David Hackworth. That's David Hackworth. And of course, he was one of the most decorated US soldiers. He fought in the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Then as you know, he was a journalist for many years, and highly decorated. I've always loved that thinking, because it's kind of like General Mattis, saying, you know, "Be friendly, but have a plan to kill everybody in the room" kind of thing. That's probably a little bit extreme for the average human being, as we go around in life, because most of us, chances are we won't encounter the type of violence that I'm talking to. But if you don't plan for it with even a modicum of thought, and when it happens, you're going to be caught flat footed.

[00:19:39] AH: Walk us through the architecture of the book. What kind of journey is the reader going to be on?

[00:19:43] RM: So, they'll probably utterly paranoid by the end of the book, but we're going to talk about how to deal with fear. What happens with fear, we've already discussed a little bit of that. We're talking about preparation, and preparation really involves two aspects of my mind.

One is to visualize problems before they occur and plan for how you would contend with that. The second one is slow practice. And I talked a little bit about slow practice in the book. Slow practice can be everything from just walking through your house on what to do for fire drill or what to do for tornado or what to do for home invasion. It also extends to shooting. Anybody familiar with shooting, understands that slow is smooth and smooth is fast. It also translates into fighting with your hands and rather than – there's a bazillion martial arts out there. But for example, injury dynamics talks about using slow practice to get the targeting perfect. If you do the targeting perfect 100, 200 times in the mat, if you ever have to fight for your life, your chances of getting it perfect are much higher, as opposed to just trying to go for speed like so many martial art skills. So, visualization, slow practice.

I've talked about the evil among us. If you look at some of the most famous mass murderers of our times, you had a guy who was Pogo the Clown, that was John Wayne Gacy, killed up to 33 young men. There was a church leader. His name was Dennis Rader, otherwise known as the BTK Strangler. There was a Canadian Air Force Colonel, David Williams, who killed two women and did 85 fetish related break ins to steal underwear and bras and he subsequently photographed himself wearing using these things. A suicide hotline volunteer Ted Bundy.

So, you know, you name it. Doctors, the British Doctor Harold Shipman believed to have killed over 236 people over the course of a quarter century, on and on and on. Those are the ones that get fame and the point about those guys is on a surface, they all appear normal. So, part of dealing with evil is understanding that it exists. I mean, I've got relatives and friends and God bless them, they never think the way I do, which is probably why they're a lot healthier mentally, than me. But they go through life and everything's great. But one day, when tragedy befalls, they're going to be less prepared.

But really, it's not the stranger that poses such a danger. I think most people are victimized by someone known to them and that could be in the case of women, it's often a spouse or domestic partner, that kind of thing. I talk about predators and women, because I have two daughters and a lovely wife, I worry for their safety and things about, it's okay to be rude if you're a woman. How many times is an elevator door open, and the woman sees a man in there and they feel uncomfortable, and they think to themselves, "If I don't get on, it'll be rude." And they get on. It happens time and time again.

So, I talk about women and protection for women, to listen to their instincts. Don't wear the darn earbuds and get your face out of the cell phone. There's a YouTube video of a bunch of people sitting on a bus and were all looking at their cell phones. And a guy at the back of the bus takes out a pistol and he goes up to the first person, takes his phone, takes his wallet, goes to the next person. It's like the fourth guy finally looks up and decides to fight back. Nobody else even was aware of what was happening because we're all looking at their cell phones. So, once the fight starts, they eventually subdue the robber, the would-be robber, but the guy that started the fight still had his cell phone in his hand. He just can't give it up.

So, situational awareness. Children, things about the county, keep your children safe. For example, when we go to anywhere, go to Costco. I'll say to the kids, "Okay, if a bad guy came in here, can you tell me where is the alternate exit? Where could we go and run?" And it takes them about five seconds and they go, "There it is." So, now we've implanted that little seed, okay, something happens. That's where we're going to go. If we go out to an event in town, we have a rally point for the children. Okay, if we get separated, this is where we're going to be blah, blah, blah. Don't have sleepovers, as fun as they are. You don't know the other family because unless you live with that family, you don't know who they are. You don't know if their kid has problems. You don't know if Uncle Jack there has problems. You don't know these things.

I talk about defending your home after that experience I had. When I came back from Afghanistan, I immediately went out and spent like \$2,000 on motion detection lights, great investment, but more cameras and how I got cameras in depth in different places and whatnot. So, I talk about that. I talk about – we've already discussed situational awareness. I also talk about something that's inacting violence to save your life. So, I talk about knife fighting or fighting with an improvised weapon. So, for example, if you were to take a magazine, roll it up and put hair bands on it, it now becomes a truncheon and it's a super hard.

So, in places overseas where we weren't allowed to have a weapon, for whatever reason. Well, nobody can say a magazine's illegal. A screwdriver. You can go to Karachi, Bangladesh, New Delhi, wherever. It's legal to have a screwdriver. Again, nobody ever wants to ever have to use something like that to fight for their life. But if you think about it ahead of time, and just ask yourself, what would be the good targets, which tends to be eyes, throat, groin, then God forbid,

if you ever find yourself in that situation, you stand a chance. I talk about firearms and the pros and cons of having those. That's a hotly debated issue in American politics right now. Personally, and I kind of go back and forth on the whole firearms issue. But I'm glad we had them in the house for my wife that day, because at the end of the day, the police and I got a son who's a policeman, but they're not going to get to you on time. The chances of that happening are almost zero. They'll there after all the time.

So, I talk about, if you're going to have a firearm, what are some of the considerations, especially children, because children always find everything that you hide. So, there's a furniture concealment device that are available in the market that are great for this type of thing. I'm talking about medical kits, that kind of thing. Basically, travel tips, because when you go overseas, don't stay – if you look at the Taj hotel incident, for example, a few years back, you don't want to be on the ground floor of a hotel. You don't want to go to the restaurants at the peak hours, because they are often targeted. If you stay between the third and sixth floors, that's pretty good. Above six, most cities don't have fire ladders that are going to reach that high. So, that's a consideration.

The way you sit in the restaurant and where you sit in a restaurant, knowing where the alternative exits are, all this kind of stuff. If you're going to go to places like China and Russia, and you're a businessman, and you take your computer, better assume that your computer is going to be compromised before you head back home. Things like that. The hotel safe, is not safe. Imagine all the staff that have access to it. It's taking a simple thing like a doorstop, little three-inch doorstop with you and you put in your luggage, and then you put that in the hotel, that makes it much harder for anybody to suddenly burst into your room, this kind of thing.

So, again, what I'm hoping to do is help people prepare for those worst 15 seconds of the worst day of their lives, so that they don't have to think about it when it's happening.

[00:27:54] AH: What would you say to people that are maybe listening to this and are thinking about Rob, he was a Marine, and then he was trained by the CIA, and he's got a background in martial arts. I mean, I'm just some slight person who doesn't have that training. How is that going to work for me? What would you say to them?

[00:28:13] RM: Every journey starts with the first step and none of this really requires any skill. Anybody of any age, if you know how to hit somebody in the throat with your forearm, as long as you have the right structure when you hit him, I don't care if you're 15 or 73, somebody's forearm if they use their weight, and I discussed how to do that your body weight, and that comes from injury dynamics. If you know how to do that, nobody's throat is stronger than it. Or nobody's eye, how many times have you been playing with your kid and this happened with my daughter, and she just barely touched my eyes like, "Whoa, stop. That's enough." So, if you know how to go after somebody eyes, there's no secret really to it. It's quite simple these things and ratcheting up your situational awareness. It's just little things that you can – it's a lifestyle choice, right? It's like, "Okay, I'm going to go to the gym, or I'm going to be safe. And if I want to be safe, I'm going to change my lifestyle. I'm not going to wear the damn earphones and I'm not going to walk around looking at my phone all the time." It's a lifestyle choice. Anybody can do any of this stuff.

[00:29:22] AH: You mentioned in the book, MMA and the popularity of Brazilian jujitsu, and the idea that every fable end up on the floor and so forth. Could you just tell us a little bit more about your kind of philosophy on martial arts or how they may or may not fit into what you're talking about in the book?

[00:29:41] RM: A lot of martial arts these days are geared to make money and people have to make a living and I get that. I've taken my kids martial arts schools where you got to pay for each belt and each test and it goes on and on and on, right? And then at the end of two years, it's like the kid still can't fight and you wonder what's up with that. So, there's a lot of that. Now, when you get to professional sports, professional sports is just that, it's a sport and there are rules and regulations, and you cannot kick somebody in the groin and you cannot poke them in the eye, and you cannot break a joint. All those guys are fabulous, fabulous competitors in they're in superb shape, and I've got nothing but respect for them for what they do.

But at the same time, for the average Joe, we don't have the hours upon hours and hours and hours and hours of to devote to the training to go compete like they do. But what we can do is spend a little bit of time, understanding what works in injury, and understanding how to impart that on somebody. It's kind of like falling into this, into water. Maybe you're not such a good swimmer, you can only doggy paddle and you can get to the side, sputtering you'll get to the

side of the pool. Or you can be an Olympic swimmer and you fall into the pool and you do the butterfly to get back and you look really cool. Either way, you got back to the side of the pool. So, the average person can learn just enough to really make a difference in those worst 15 seconds. You don't need to spend all the time necessary to go compete in MMA and that kind of thing. If you want to go for it. God bless you.

[00:31:21] AH: Is this similar to something like Krav Maga? There's no can of rose, it's just maintain the objective of being saved on the situation? Is that similar?

[00:31:31] RM: It is similar. Krav Maga is a great style. The guy that got me into injury dynamics actually was a Krav guy and they translate. There's only so many ways to hurt somebody and nobody has the patent or the market on how to do that exactly. So, I would say the only difference between something like Krav and injury dynamics or injury dynamics also came from target focus training. The only difference is I think Krav emphasizes more speed, whereas injury dynamics and target focus training emphasize working slowly to get the targeting correct each and every time. So therefore, I think, because of that, you're working slowly, and you're less prone to injury that you are in some of these other martial arts. Especially if you're older, I hate to say it, but I'm more prone to getting injured now at the tender age of 61 than I was when I was 21. So, something like injury dynamics, target focus training, is excellent to learn enough skill to be able to save your life in it without killing yourself learning it.

[00:32:35] AH: I mean, many people will have heard of Krav Maga, but for those that haven't come across injury dynamic and target focus training, could you just tell us the sort of elevator pitch version of those?

[00:32:47] RM: Yeah. So, they evolved out of California. Target focus training has been around since about mid-90s, I believe. Tim Larkin is the well-known creator of that. And with him was Chris Ranck-Buhr. A couple of years ago, there was an amicable split and now injury dynamics started up with Chris Ranck-Buhr. Target focus training is doing the same thing. But there's this exact same – really, it's the same thinking, same methodology. If you want to learn how to impart injury, to save your life or a loved one's life, without having to spend the hours and hours and hours necessary, then it's a great way to go. It really is.

If you're looking for the cultural aspect or gather chi to whatever people who gather chi do to feel better and be one, don't do that.

[00:33:45] AH: Are they martial arts?

[00:33:48] RM: Yes, in the sense of it's brutally efficient. In injury dynamics, for example, we're trying to achieve the first time we strike, we want to achieve an injury, I mean, a real injury. Not something that somebody can rapidly recover from. Once you get that first injury, you go for serial injury. So, if you go for a kick in the groin, that exposes the neck. Once you hit the neck, now the person would be on the ground, that makes them vulnerable to a stop, that kind of thing. So, it's quite brutal, but there's no reason why you can't be a good citizen and a decent human being. If necessary, to defend your life or your family's life, be able to switch that on.

[SPONSOR MESSAGE]

[00:34:29] AH: I want to take a moment to thank this week's sponsor, the Jordan Harbinger Show. Are you looking for a podcast that's entertaining, and formative and packed with actionable content? I know what you're thinking. I'm already hooked up with SpyCast. But did you know that the average podcast listener has six shows in rotation, so you're most likely not just listening to SpyCast and that's perfectly okay.

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:35:29] AH: Okay, that's really helpful. I think it would be interesting now to just slightly have it to your career and your background in intelligence. How is a similar or different to what you learned as a CIA officer?

[00:35:45] RM: Well, the agency really changed focus after 9/11. So, counterterrorism really took over our efforts. I enjoyed being in that. So, because of that effort, we got exposed more to more in-depth medical training, and dealing with agents that may have terrorist connections in this kind of thing. That training, it kind of comes in, you get – 2001 you take a course and then in 2006, you take another course and then whatever, 2009. So, what I've tried to do in the book is kind of bring these things together in one place. So, what I've tried to do is take the lessons I learned from them, and present them in one package.

[00:36:38] AH: Who would you have to use it against? Are we talking about, okay, you're just in a foreign setting that's generalized crime or as a foreign intelligence officers? As an agent who turns against you? Who are you primarily training for to deal with?

[00:36:54] RM: Right. So, for something like situational awareness, if you're living and working overseas, then, especially depending on where you're at, there's been some countries that have posed a greater threat to being an American and others. When we leave our home, and when we arrive at work, those are the two variables that we can't change. We're always going to leave home, we're always going to arrive at work, we're always going to leave work and arrive at home.

So, situational awareness is the most important skill I think agency officers possess, because they have to be aware of all kinds of threats in a place where terrorism could be an issue that many of us opened the door to my house and I step out, now the threat, my antenna is going to go up. Does my car look okay? In some places I might have to get down in my hands and knees and look under the car, search the car carefully. Get in the car. Now, because I have to leave from work, or from my home to go to work, well, the bad guys know that. And they know that if they can identify where I live and where I work, that's a logical place to try to kill me. So, in a counterterrorism environment, that's where I wouldn't be the most vigilant.

Now I can change how I drive to work. I can change the times that I drive to work. But I can't change the work location, and I can't change my home. So, situational awareness in a counterterrorism context is now you start looking, "Okay, do I see people standing around that weren't there before? Do they look like they belong?" But of course, in some of these countries, if you go to some of the third world environments, there's millions of people standing around.

So, that becomes even more critical of a skill. But what looks normal, and what doesn't look normal? That translates also lead into just our civilian lives, which is, if I'm going to go to the ATM, what looks normal, what doesn't look normal. And that also translates for my family, because they don't get the training. They don't get, how to do surveillance detection or anything like that. So, I got to teach them the same thing. So, really those skills, I'm super grateful that I've had them and most of it is just putting into play every day, every day, every day for multiple tours overseas.

[00:39:20] AH: Who are the types of threats? Why are you learning this stuff? Is it for foreign intelligence officer?

[00:39:26] RM: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

[00:39:28] AH: Is it against you or all of the above?

[00:39:29] RM: Yeah, absolutely. You're absolutely right. For the many distinguished guests, I've seen on your vlog, you know that in extreme detail, depending on where you are in the world. The whole service could pose a threat intelligence service, could be in some parts of eastern Europe, for example, the Russians are going to have more sway than they would say the UK for example. So, absolutely. These core skills all came out of dealing against other intelligence services. The skills bleed over into crime, they bleed over into the counterterrorism realm, and it's just there's some tweaks that we use in the counterterrorism realm that we wouldn't necessarily use and just worrying about an intelligence service. With an intelligence service, there's almost a gentlemen's agreement that you don't go around killing each other. That doesn't exist in the counterterrorism realm.

[00:40:23] AH: So again, sorry to kind of go again at this point. But if there's a gentleman's agreement between foreign intelligence services that are not going to kill each other, why do you need to train?

[00:40:34] RM: Ultimately, to protect the people who step up – the foreign nationals who step up and agree to help the US government. We owe them everything in terms of protection. So, the last thing a case officer ever wants to do is not be situationally aware and bring surveillance

to a meeting with a foreign national, who's risking everything, their livelihood, their lives, to help the US government. So, just out of protection of those agents. That is why we learned these skills.

[00:41:07] AH: So, it would be learning these skills so that when you're meeting an agent, you can protect them, or you can look after them if someone tries to do something?

[00:41:15] RM: To protect the agent's identity, number one. And also, when you work with the agent over time, you want to teach them so they can help protect themselves. It's a cat and mouse game. But the ultimate goal is to absolutely protect these people that lay everything on the line to help the US government.

[00:41:34] AH: I guess one of the questions that many of our listeners may have is a lot of what your average person on the street learns about intelligences from the movies or from TV. I mean, this was brought home to me what the movie, Braveheart. The only thing that most people know about 14th century Scotland, is from that movie, so we help our listeners understand the difference between fact and fiction. They may think of Jason Bourne, every CIA officer is some badass, self-defense expert, Kung Fu expert. Help us understand what types of people get trained? How similar is the training to get to what you see on TV? Help us understand some of that relationship.

[00:42:18] RM: Yeah, Hollywood has been really unkind to the agency over the years. I'm hard pressed to really think of anything that captures the agency. Well, maybe Zero Dark 30 kind of came close, I thought, on the hunt for Bin Laden. But yeah, Hollywood just doesn't cut it. Although, I can remember being a kid and watching Get Smart and going, "Hey, that's really cool. I like to do that." It's funny, but it looks like it's fun, too. And of course, a young teenager saw James Bond and what have you.

Unfortunately, I got to say the agency is really not as glamorous as any of that. I never saw Bond do any accounting, for example, or any writing. He's never had to write up any of his encounters, it seems like. So, Hollywood's done a bad job about that. Having said that, I looked back at my career and it's amazing that some of the adventures that I experienced and encountered and some of the people, I met, the agency is just full of people who really believe

in the mission. And even though they get beat up over social issues, and beat up in the news and beat up by politicians on both sides of the aisle, the rank and file are just some phenomenal people. So, I would say if to any listener, if they want to be a part of that, that's a wonderful thing to be a part of. It doesn't come without sacrifice, and that sacrifice is spending lots of time away from family and missing the important events, and probably aging a little bit faster than you would. Otherwise, I don't know. But, man, it's worth it.

[00:43:56] AH: Help listeners understand, like with the types of training that you speak about in the book, where we're talking about operations officers, right? Analysts don't get this type of training.

[00:44:09] RM: Right. So, I mean, we've already discussed some of it. It's how to protect an agent and all that goes into all the work and effort and planning and scenario thinking, and what ifs they go into protecting the agent. It also involves how to make sure the agent is sincere, and that they're not double or falsifying information and this kind of thing. So, there's that whole aspect. And then it's how do we find these rare human beings, these agents who are willing and able to help the American government understand situations. That, I think, is certainly a special skill set. And then once you can identify those people and find them, how to talk to them to see if they're willing. Sometimes that's a chess game. Some people may finally get to them and they say, "Hey, I've been waiting for you. What took you so long?" And then others, it might take years before they finally feel, maybe they found the right person and you can't discount luck in this business. But you can make your luck by being prepared.

[00:45:27] AH: And over the years, when you were in the CIA, did you ever come across anyone who had a really unique ability to assess someone who could be an agent? So, there's learning something, there's training, but I guess I'm thinking of something similar to what some people said Rommel had, which was what they called **[inaudible 00:45:48]**. Like a fingertip feeling is that he had an uncanny ability to read like the battlefield. Have you come across like operators that had just some kind of uncanny ability to assess threats or to assess agents?

[00:46:05] RM: Yes, absolutely. It's a skill. You'll hear it often described as a skill, akin to courting your spouse. So, you meet your spouse. You find out what your spouse, before she's your spouse, what she's interested in. And hopefully that matches what you are interested in, or

this is the doomed relationship. Then you have a courtship, and you get to know each other, and you establish trust with each other. By the time you pop the question to your spouse, "Hey, would you like to get married?" You already know the answer. If she says no way, that's a surprise to you. You didn't do your homework, right? So, that wasn't meant to be.

I mean, espionage, I think is quite similar to that. And then there is a honeymoon period, and everything's great and then life has a way of getting in the way of things. Situations change for people and sometimes they feel like, well, maybe this relationship isn't going to work out after all, and maybe it's time to cauterize that relationship now without the expense of all the divorce lawyers, of course. So, sometimes the relationship will end that way, too. I'm being a little bit evasive here, because I don't want the lightning bolts from headquarters to come down and zap me for talking about the things I shouldn't be talking about. But really, it's a courtship. It's a human relationship, and people who understand how people feel and understand what motivates people. I have often felt that handling agents, recruiting agents is akin to being a good leader. So, if you set the example, know your stuff, and take care of your people, those are the qualities we wanted a case officer to deal with agents, because people are people and everybody has problems and issues and worries in our lives.

[00:47:54] AH: I don't want the lightning bolts to stretch.

[00:47:57] RM: That would not be cool.

[00:48:01] AH: I feel like in the public imagination, there's probably two different types of operator that they think of. There's the inflaming type of operator whereas 6'3", handsome man, who can make the room light up, and everyone's eating out of his hand.

[00:48:19] RM: Which is not me, by the way.

[00:48:21] AH: It's not for me to say. There's the John le Carré skill where it's like George smiley, where it's just the kind of instantly forgettable kind figure. Is intelligence of broad church where both of those figures can thrive? Or is it really better if you're someone that people are just eating out of your hand? Or is it better if those people just never no issue exists?

[00:48:44] RM: That's a great question. I've never been able to adequately answer it myself. Because I've looked at – I've been involved for a long time and training and dealing in my career. I've always wondered, what is it that makes case officer – what's the one quality that case officers have because they are such a wide variety of people? Yes, there are the charismatic people, and they're very extroverted. But there's also introverts who may have a science background, for example. But they are able to do the job just as well as the glad-handing extrovert. In fact, I would argue too extrovert is not good, because nobody wants to put their lives in the hands of a car salesman, kind of thing.

So, I really don't know the answer to that question. I've wondered for many years, what the baseline? I think the baseline is simply people who love the work and are willing to do it is really that baseline, and you could be introverted or extroverted. We need case officers who have a science background, who have a technical background, who have a liberal arts background. There's no one size fits all. I think the Smiley, the George Smiley guys are the frankly the best ones.

[00:50:00] AH: Give us the brief overview of your career in the CIA, the types of things that you've done and types of possessions that you found yourself and or memorable moments. I know there's a lot there, but give us a kind of flavor of your background.

[00:50:14] RM: Sure, I think I've spent most of my career overseas. So, I haven't worked at headquarters since like '93 or '92, or something like that, '91. So, that's a rarity in the agency and I'm kind of proud of that. So, I was able to spend most of my career outside of headquarters.

Again, prior to 2001. It was more cold war-ish type of work that we were consumed in. I did that mostly in parts of Asia. Then post 9/11, I spent a lot of time in Southeast Asia and then in a couple of tours in Afghanistan, a couple of tours plus. The first time I went to Afghanistan in 2002, it was a very hopeful time in Afghanistan, and there was an optimism in the air and you could – everything was destroyed. But you could feel there was an optimism in the air. When I went back several years later, that had disappeared and there was more violence. And that was kind of the ramp up to the US military presence in Afghanistan.

Then when I went back the last time, several years after that, there was a pessimism in the air. You didn't have the freedom of movement. In 2002, I could drive around and give candy to kids and take pictures when I had free time and whatnot. Those days are long gone. I feel for Afghanistan, because I love that country. Some of the people here there are utterly phenomenal and I feel badly for what's going to happen in Afghanistan. My personal opinion is it'll kind of go back to the way it was after the Russians pulled out, there'll be competing factions and it's going to be a while before that poor country can come back to normal, whatever normal is for Afghanistan anymore.

One of the experiences I talked about in the book was, when I was in Afghanistan, we had a suicide bomber attack one of our outposts in a van with about 2,000 pounds of explosives. I was in my room at the time. It was lunchtime. I had this little app on my phone, I was doing yoga. And just as the nice lady on the app goes namaste, there's a huge explosion just rattled everything. "Oh, man!" You go from the resting heartbeat to the rapid heartbeat. I just remember jogging over to our command center there, all the base was mobilized to prepare for a fight and thinking, I was in a leadership position there, so it was important to not look rattled and upset and whatever.

So, I've had those kinds of experiences. I have dealt with some agents that were just phenomenal human beings, and the risks that they took to get information for the US government was just a humbling experience to see. I dedicate the book, also to paramilitary officers in the agency, who are just some of the most phenomenal human beings I've ever met. They possess a special quality that just amazes me, because a lot of those guys have significant military experience and for most of us, it's like, "Okay, I've done that. I want to enjoy life now and kind of not take the type of risks." But there is a special quality that those guys have, where they go back again and again and again, to these danger zones, whether these various war zones that never seem to end. They're phenomenal.

[00:53:44] AH: What year did you join the agency and when did you leave?

[00:53:46] RM: I joined in '85 and left in 2018.

[00:53:51] AH: 2018.

[00:53:53] RM: It's raining down here. Can you hear that? At least a dog's not licking its paws because you would hear that too.

[00:54:00] AH: That's fine. It's atmospheric, I guess. You've mentioned Afghanistan a couple of times, and you joined up four years before the Russians withdrew. The last president was saying that American troops would leave them in and the current president and September, whatever we shake, so it looks like this is leaving Afghanistan. It's kind of interesting to me because the first casualty, Afghan casualty inside Afghanistan was **[inaudible 00:54:27]** anniversary this coming year. So, what's your sense of Afghanistan and the history of the agency means or how significant is it? Give us a sense of that.

[00:54:40] RM: I think the agency did a fantastic job overall in Afghanistan. Once, in my humble opinion, once big military arrived in Afghanistan, things got much more bureaucratic and game crunching to a halt and couldn't do this and couldn't do that and the agency's not set up to run and fix broken countries. But where the agency had a significant presence, things were more stable in those areas. It's too bad. We couldn't replicate that on a wider scale.

[00:55:17] AH: There's a lot going on there that we could talk about.

[00:55:20] RM: That will take a bottle of wine there.

[00:55:23] AH: Well, it's just interested to know a little bit more about what you've done since 2018. What kinds of things have you been up to? What do you do at present?

[00:55:30] RM: I did some contracting for defense companies. I'm more of a man of leisure now than I was in my career. So, I've started a little company, for lack of a better term teaching things like injury dynamics, and home protection, things like that. It's my hobby, and I enjoy doing it. I enjoy when somebody who thought they couldn't do it suddenly realizes, "Hey, I can do this kind of thing." That gives me satisfaction. Of course, this past year, I've been homeschooling my 6, 8, and 10-year-old. So, that takes a lot of time too, to brainwash those little guys.

[00:56:05] AH: Is there anything that you think is important to discuss that we haven't managed to touch upon yet? Is there anything that you think, why the hell did you not mention that, Andrew?

[00:56:15] RM: No, in fact, you're a sly devil, because you got to be talking about things that I normally wouldn't be talking about. But good on you. Again, if anybody's considering an agency career, go for it. It's a wonderful experience. It's unlike anything else in government. You look back, when you're young, you don't realize that someday you'll be in your 60s. But when you're in your 60s, you look back, oh, man, that time goes by fast. So, I feel sorry for people who I've known in my life, who grew up in the same town and lived in same town and will probably pass away in the same town without having experienced all the wonderful things that there are to see in this world. There's just so many wonders and interesting experiences to be had out there and I'm kind of envious of people who are starting that journey again.

[00:56:58] AH: It's been quite the journey, huh? Where were you born and raised, Rob?

[00:57:01] RM: So, I was born in Mexico. My dad was the World War Two veteran. So, after the war, he determined that he could live quite nicely on his VA benefit down in Mexico City where he met my mother, and we lived there for two years. My first two years of wife and then we moved to Pennsylvania, and grew up there and then later we moved to Connecticut as a teenager, then I joined the Marine Corps and never really looked back at that point.

[00:57:26] AH: Well, thanks ever so much for taking the time to speak to me today. It's been a pleasure.

[00:57:31] RM: No, it has been a pleasure. I got to tell you, I heard one of your guests the other day, teasing you about your accent. I just got to share this one vignette with you. So, they made me remember this. So, when I was in Helmand Province, I think it was a battalion of Black Watch arrived and I went over there one day to liaise with them. And I had this other American with me. The lieutenant said something to me and I looked at him. I said, "I'm sorry, could you say that one more time, please?" So, he repeated it. And I looked at my guide, he looked at me, I'm like, "I'm really sorry. Can you just say that one more time, please?" He said it again. For the life of me, I still don't know to this day what he said. And it was even worse when we were

talking on the radio. But that was a fond memory for me and I really enjoyed my interaction with those guys, and I look forward to getting over to Scotland one these days.

[END]