

Burkina Faso hotel siege: 'Like a scene out of a movie'

16 January 2016 | Africa



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Security forces have ended a siege by Islamist militants of the Splendid Hotel in Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou.

Edward Bunker, an American health worker for an NGO, was staying at the hotel. He spent the night hunkered down in his room and was rescued in the early hours of Saturday morning:

"At about 19:30 on Friday the fire alarm went off. I went out of the room and saw other guests milling about, and no one seemed to be really concerned. So I went back to my room to get ready to leave for the airport.

I went downstairs to settle the bill around 20:30 and it was like a scene out of a movie with smoke, gunfire noise, explosions - but all outside of the walls. And a very, very empty and dark lobby.

I saw someone carrying a gun just outside the hotel and a burning car across the street. and that was my 'oh sh**' moment. I hid near the pool for about five minutes and figured I might just want to plan to spend the night down there.

Some cooks and kitchen staff walked by, and I made some inquiries as best as I could in French. They said I should go back to my room. That was probably the best piece of advice I got that night.

I turned on the news to see what was happening.

I ended up spending the night in my bathroom with my computer and - luckily - a good wifi connection. I was able to get in touch with family and friends and **crucially also a security consultant from my organisation as well as the US embassy.**

It was amazing how quickly the night passed and I was thankful to have the internet for the whole time. In fact, it was a great distraction to catch up on emails and pretend it was a normal working day.

Staying in the bathroom was one piece of advice from the security consultant - to put as many doors between me and the militants. Another was to make as little sound as possible and turn the lights off.

As the security forces approached my room at around 04:00 I was pretty certain they were in fact soldiers - and not militants.

I heard voices that sounded rational and it appeared they were giving instructions in French. They seemed to be making their way methodically through the building. Again, our security consultant was able to advise me that there were French forces in the building and the sounds they were making fitted with the likely pattern of events.

They approached my door and I announced myself - as I had been advised. They told me to open the door slowly and there I saw three French troops with rifles pointing at me, along with some US soldiers.

As they led me out we passed the lobby. I noticed furniture had been tossed around and there was a clear trail of destruction.

Suddenly there was another round of gunfire, and we were told to get down for five to 10 minutes. Lying on the floor with incoming fire and protected by soldiers, I felt it was the closest I was ever going to get to experiencing combat.

Just as the sun was coming up I was led into an armoured personnel carrier and driven down the road to meet US embassy staff."

Risk and Strategic Management, Corp provided Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT) to Edward and his colleagues as part of a formal awareness and competency building program...

Mike Blyth (COO RSM) was the named consultant in this article, providing ongoing advice to Edward throughout the hotel siege, while also concurrently advising the executive leadership team on organizational resilience and crisis management strategies.