

The Escape Attempt

When Michael's trial was over and the guilty verdict was delivered, he shocked the court when he leapt from the dock in a bid for escape. A few weeks later, a hire car was discovered in a Tesco car-park containing a survival kit and weapons.

Published originally in June 2013, Michael writes, in his own words, about his thoughts and fears prior to planning his escape:

At the time of my arrest, when I was out on bail and during my trial, my future and the future of my children and wife was in the hands of other people. People that had their own agendas. I had no control over what was going on. I had to put my trust and faith in the Scottish justice system. A justice system that I had seen wrongly convict my Dad on lies. I didn't know how the courts and lawyers worked. When they talked in legal terms and when they tried to put it in layman terms it still mostly sounded like gobbledegook. I still thought, if I've done nothing wrong I will be fine and should have nothing to worry about. This was still in the shadow of seeing my Dad being wrongly convicted. I was more in disbelief at the whole situation. I thought I could trust the Scottish justice system to work.

In the time I was out on bail before my trial I had to sort things out like my banking and other administrative things like the small amount of savings I had and transferring it in to accounts that my wife could use. Talking to the hierarchy of my regiment to see what happens with my pension. I'm not entitled to a pension after being convicted. What the possibilities of employment would be if I was convicted and then get out on appeal. Housing for my wife and kids. The uncertainty of the unknown of what the outcome of the trial would be played on my mind. Would my children have their Dad there to help bring them up, to give them support and encouragement, to give them a cuddle when they fall and hurt a knee? Would my wife have her husband to help provide for her and our family and to support her through the hardships of life? It was like I was planning for my own death and that I would no longer exist.

The military side of me was thinking that I needed another option other than just rely on people I don't know. So my thoughts were that I should fight it out in court but if it looked like things were going to go bad I would just run away. So I thought if it looks bad in the last week of my trial I will just go and live in the hills in the highlands of Scotland and just live off the land. If it looks ok, I would stay to the end of the trial. I know it wasn't a realistic solution as I would have been captured at some point and it wasn't practical from a family point of view as I would miss my family and they would miss me. It would also put a lot of strain and pressure on my wife, but this was already happening with the build up to the trial.

Planning and preparing for an escape gave me some focus for all the chaos that was about to take over my life. It made me feel like I had some sort of control on what was going on and it

made me feel like I didn't have to rely on people I didn't know. I did all the planning on my own. My wife didn't know anything about it and my parents and friends in the army didn't know anything I was planning.

My intent was to live out in the countryside and live off the land foraging and hunting for food. I had done a few survival exercises in the army and a little 'conduct after capture' training on my sniper section commander's course. I had an interest in survival and had studied it in my spare time. It also had military applications for me as in full on war, snipers can conduct stay behind operations when a friendly army withdraws or is pushed back. Snipers working in pairs or in small groups living off the land to survive would observe, pass on information and slow an advancing enemy force.

I did have some army rations in my kit for emergencies but it wouldn't have lasted long. In my kit I had a sleeping bag, bivvy bag, poncho and a roll mat for sleeping and shelter. I had boots, camouflage army uniform for hunting, fleece and warm clothes, goretex waterproofs and some civilian clothes. I had cooking pots, condiments like salt, pepper and curry powders also tea, coffee and sugar. I had several knives for skinning and gutting game and an axe to build shelters. I had an air rifle for hunting small game like rabbits, pigeons and pheasants. I had fishing gear, but I was always a crap fisherman.

The scorpion machine pistol I had for hunting bigger game like roe deer. I know a lot of people will probably think 'yeah, right, a machine pistol for hunting, pull the other one - the scorpion was designed for Czech and Serbian tank crews not for hunting.' The scorpion I had was a Serbian manufactured pistol in 7.65mm/32ACP. It could fire single shots or automatic. It was very accurate and firing a single shot would take down a deer. If I had a full-bore hunting rifle that would be more appropriate and better at taking down deer. I did have a firearms licence and had two full bore rifles that would do the job but the police confiscated them when I was arrested. I got the scorpion when I was in Kosovo. We had been doing searches and I had found it. I'm interested in firearms and thought, it's only going to be cut up or thrown into an arms dump if I hand it in. I know I should not have taken it and I know it was illegal to have it in Britain but I thought, well I'm not going to be using it for doing bad things like armed robbery or threatening and hurting people. It was just something that I was interested in and I was using assault rifles and machine guns daily. Soldiers have been picking up souvenirs in war zones since there have been wars. I had 545 rounds of ammunition for the scorpion. This may seem a lot but I was thinking long term so it was to last a while. Most range days in the army I would be firing that amount and thinking nothing of it. I had the scorpion for about 7 years, so the people that think I'm some kind of racist murderer -why was there no crime committed with it? The police would have done a ballistics test as soon as they got it to see if it was involved in any crimes. It wasn't.

I had one L109 high explosive grenade. I got it from a recruit after a live firing exercise. He had forgotten about it and handed it to me after the range had been closed down. I had it as I thought if I was out living off the land long term there would be times when I was very hungry and

unable to get food. I'm a poor fisherman but in an emergency I intended to use it by throwing it into a small lochan to get some fish. Grenade fishing. You will find stuff on Youtube probably of Royal Marines grenade fishing in Afghanistan. I had some other types of ammo and some signal smoke grenades also. They were of no real use to me. I had just taken them out of my house so that my wife didn't have to bother with any of it. It was just extra stuff left over from exercises.

As I said before, I thought if it looked bad the last week of my trial I would go away in the car. I thought the trial had gone not too badly so I stayed until the end. When the verdict came back 'guilty' I just panicked and thought 'fuck it'. A fight or flight reaction. When I was caught I could have fought and I could have got away, but that's not what I had planned. Where I had parked the car was well away from the court. If I had planned to escape from court it would have been in one of the car parks outside the court.

I spent a week in Barlinnie prison with the car left in the car park. I could have got family or friends to move it for me but didn't want to get them into trouble. I thought about getting some of the senior people in my regiment to hand the car into the police for me, but thought it would tar their names. I thought of getting people in prison to get their criminal pals to get rid of it for me, but thought again and didn't want them to get a hold of that type of gun and grenade. What might have happened to someone because of my selfishness? So I just thought it's my mess, my problem. I've made my bed and I'll lay in it.

Despite me planning all that I still never really thought I would use it. I still thought I've done nothing wrong, I've not murdered anyone, I will be all right. What little so called evidence was mostly lies and I thought the jury would see through all of that.

The Scottish justice system likes to be seen to provide justice for society. Real justice is not always given out. The justice system and judges do not like to admit they've made mistakes.

When Michael was arrested in Ireland, he asked politely if the officers wouldn't handcuff him in front of his wife and children. He said he would come willingly and wanted to sort this out in court and that he'd done nothing wrong. He walked to and from the court each day and showed himself to have dignity and reserve. He put his faith and trust in Scottish justice.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?