

# ELECTRIC EYE

HOME-SECURITY CAMERA REALITIES

■ BY TIM COOPER





Anyone who reads this publication or has attended a USCCA training class knows the only certain way to survive a violent encounter is to avoid it altogether. We are taught to practice situational awareness in an effort to, when possible, detect trouble before it reaches critical mass. However, too often, those of us who embrace the concealed carry lifestyle overlook ways to practice these conflict-avoidance strategies at home.

One great way to stack the deck in your favor is to employ the power of network-ready security cameras. This technology is now well within reach of the average consumer. It's inexpensive, easy to install and provides true HD-quality video.

But can the kind of cameras you can buy off-the-rack at Best Buy or Costco really protect your castle? Are they worth the money, or should that money go to more expensive models? Glad you asked; I have a personal experience to share with you.

### FRIDAY, 4:05 P.M. — THE WHISKEY TANGO FOXTROT MOMENT

My wife had run a few errands and returned home. She parked her car and entered the house from the garage. The first odd thing she noticed was that our dog Clara had apparently peed all over the hardwood kitchen floor. This was not

just a little "accident." There was pee everywhere, which was definitely not characteristic of Clara.

Odd thing No. 2: The front door was ajar. We always lock the doors whether home or away. However, my in-laws live nearby and have a key. Perhaps they had popped in and neglected to pull the door closed.

A few seconds later, she noticed the TV was missing from the family room. That's when she slowly backed out of the house and called me at work: "Did you come home and pick up the TV?" I told her to call 911; I then shut down my computer and headed for the door.

The responding officer walked through our house with my wife. They discovered the glass pane in the walk-out basement door was shattered. The plasma TV in the basement had been pulled out of the entertainment center and dropped on the floor, apparently too heavy to carry. Miraculously, the only items missing were the lighter-weight TV and a pair of speakers from the main floor.



### ■ MODERN CAMERAS

offer a lot of advantages over the old-style models they replaced. Not only are these cameras wireless and a lot easier to install, but they also record directly to "the cloud," making it impossible to steal recorded footage.

### FRIDAY, 4:15 P.M. — THE EUREKA MOMENT

As I walked to the car with my heart racing and adrenaline coursing through my veins, I suddenly realized I had forgotten to check my

security-camera alerts on my phone. I normally pay close attention to these alerts, but my wife is home on Fridays. It's the one day of the week I fully expect motion to be detected in and around the house.

I took my phone out of my pocket and saw the lock screen was loaded with "motion detected" notifications. Sure enough, I saw a guy knocking on my door in a not-too-convincing repair technician getup. The next recordings on the timeline showed a maroon Jeep Cherokee backing up the driveway and the same guy back on the doorstep trying unsuccessfully to kick in the front door and then walking out our front door loaded down with my TV and speakers a few minutes later.

### SUNDAY, 1:30 P.M. — THE MOMENT MY INVESTMENT PAID OFF

Less than 48 hours later, the detective working our case called to tell me they had our guy in custody — a 60-year-old crack addict named Raymond with a long history of B&Es, an armed robbery conviction and even an attempted prison escape. The state police forensics team had been able to pull most of the license plate number from one of my video recordings and matched the plate and vehicle to the scene of another similar crime in a nearby neighborhood. Furthermore, after viewing other



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recordings, the burglar's employer confirmed Raymond's identity and recognized the work uniform he used for the repair-tech costume.

## ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY

My security cameras are Arlo brand, made by Netgear — a company that specializes in small- and home-office networking products. Arlo offers three different camera lines: Standard, Pro and Pro 2. Common features for all three models include:

- HD-quality video output with night vision
- Weatherproof construction for outdoor use
- Cordless, battery-powered design for quick and easy installation
- Automated, motion-activated video recording
- Secure cloud storage for video recordings, ensuring video evidence cannot be stolen or destroyed

The Standard and Pro models record at 720p resolution, while the Pro 2 records at a much sharper 1080p. Both

Pro-series cameras offer two-way audio and proprietary rechargeable batteries. A slick phone app notifies you of motion activity, plays recorded video stored in the cloud and even live-streams cameras on-demand. The app also allows you to create custom modes (such as "arm outside cameras only") and rules ("from 5 p.m. to midnight"). There is also a "geofencing" mode that uses your phone's GPS capability to determine when you're home and when you're away.

The most difficult task associated with installation is determining where to mount and aim the cameras. Connecting the base station to your network and pairing the cameras is painless and takes just seconds. Arlo is not the only viable option. Nest, Ring and Blink are also quality brands with similar features and pricing.

When selecting a system, you'll want to consider other home-automation products you own. For example, if you have a Nest thermostat, it may make sense to go with Nest cameras. Simi-

larly, some systems are compatible with Amazon Alexa and others with Apple HomeKit. If integration with one of these ecosystems is important, check compatibility before you buy. Street price for a typical four-camera Arlo kit is \$350 to \$700, depending upon the video resolution and features you're looking for.

Nearly all popular models automatically detect motion, record and play back video, and stream live feeds using common Wi-Fi technology. As convenient as they are, don't make the mistake of assuming all Wi-Fi cameras are completely wire-free. Some brands, such as Arlo and Blink, are powered by long-life batteries, making them 100 percent wire-free. Others, such as Nest, still require a wired connection to an electrical outlet for power. There are pros and cons to wire-free cameras; while easier to install, they require periodic battery charging or replacement.

## REALITY CHECK

While our camera system was instrumental in apprehending a repeat



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offender, the euphoria evaporated quickly. The reality is, despite the use of sophisticated technology and deliberate preparation for a potential break-in, we were mostly caught flat-footed. Our planned response to a home invasion had always been based upon the assumption it would happen at night while we were sleeping; not once did we consider the scenario of a desperate drug addict showing up on our doorstep in the middle of the day. If my wife had been home, she would have checked the front-door camera when the burglar knocked and refused to answer, electing instead to hide somewhere in the house and call 911. So it is highly likely the guy still would have forced his way in. What if she had been trapped in the basement or elsewhere in the house where we had no firearm? (Suffice it to say we now have a few more strategically placed guns around the home.)

It is painfully obvious that we allowed ourselves to fall into that dreaded state of Condition White, ignoring nearly 30 Arlo motion alerts on our phones the day

of the burglary. To make matters worse, the audible burglar alarm with door-entry and glass-breakage sensors had not been armed when my wife left for her errands. The siren very likely would have chased the crackhead away and saved us a costly, out-of-pocket insurance deductible.

We also realized the door chosen for the most vulnerable point of entry was, without doubt, the least secure one in our home. It had a full-height window-pane that was just waiting to be kicked in. The replacement door takes this into consideration and includes a much smaller window at the top, as well as a three-point deadbolt system.

### SO, BACK TO THE QUESTION...

Do these inexpensive security cameras really work? Yes, but they can only provide protection if you religiously activate them whenever you leave your residence and pay attention to every notification you receive on your phone. It's also important to think outside of what you assume

a home invasion will look like when you're developing your family's emergency plans. It is highly unlikely your real-life scenario will play out like a stereotypical break-in portrayed on TV; plan for the unexpected and harden all vulnerable points of entry.

Above all else, remember that cameras and other security-system components do not reduce the importance of maintaining a constant state of situational awareness. Like an exercise regimen or healthy diet, a camera system (or any system for that matter) will not improve your security without a serious commitment on your part. Without that, these cameras are just cool toys.



### SOURCES

**Arlo:** Arlo.com

**Blink:** BlinkForHome.com

**Nest:** Nest.com

**Ring:** Ring.com

## Pocket buddies

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