

be a worthwhile one.

For example, I was prepared to trust the journalists who prepared that particular article. Not very far from here I spent an evening with them talking, more off the record than on. On recollection, I could honestly state that I put a great deal on the line that night.

What a pity that the journalists chose not to trust the Australian Federal Police and the journalists we employ. If they had taken the simple precaution of letting us read their copy, purely to check it for accuracy, the whole silly episode may well have been avoided.

In this case mutual trust would have been mutually beneficial.

It is worth adding a footnote. It is my understanding that one of the reasons the newspaper in question erred in such a profound and spectacular fashion was due to media competition. The article had been due for publication at a later date, but was hastily thrown into the paper because a competing newspaper was also undertaking a major coverage on drugs issues.

I hope I have not been unfair by singling out an offending newspaper, albeit anonymously. To maintain some balance let me now recount the most monumental foul-up perpetrated by the Australian Federal Police.

You may well have guessed already that I am referring to the anti-terrorist exercise that the Federal Police conducted in Canberra last year. Somewhere, somehow, along the line, our relations with the news media went distinctly sour.

I don't like doing it, but I have to stand here and tell you that the

blame for this debacle lay fairly and squarely with the police.

When the chips were down and the media wanted no more than to get close to the hypothetical epicentre of a hypothetical terrorist siege, one hundred years of traditional hostility suddenly asserted itself.

The police stuck in their heels and what is euphemistically called "a situation" quickly developed.

Fortunately, the media displayed more maturity than we did by promptly staging a unanimous walk-out, and that was the end of their active interest in our exercise.

I hasten to add that I was overseas at the time, but I understand television that night and newspapers the following day were a lot kinder to the Australian Federal Police than was actually warranted.

When I returned to Australia, the first thing I did was to personally apologise to representatives of all the organisations who covered our exercise.

#### Discussions

As many of you know there has in recent times been a series of entirely off-the-record discussions between Government officials, the police and journalists, about the rôle of the media during a major terrorist incident.

In Canberra recently I chaired the A.C.T. briefing. I had more than the usual interest in that meeting in light of our unhappy experience with our anti-terrorist exercise last year.

Towards the end of the meeting I circulated a series of resolutions that had been passed by a similar meeting of media and government

representatives in London, in the wake of the Princes Gate siege last year.

These resolutions comprise a general code of ethics that could govern police/media relations during a protracted terrorist incident.

When we adapted these resolutions for our Canberra meeting, the only change was to leave out altogether the final paragraph. This was a statement to the effect that the police need not necessarily tell journalists covering a siege that the information being given them is in fact, "disinformation".

As I said at the time, the word "disinformation" is not in the Federal Police vocabulary if we are talking about our relationship with you, the media.

Rather, if police or negotiators had to achieve a crucial objective in a hostage situation, and could only do so by getting disinformation broadcast or printed in the news media, then we would put our trust in you and explain the situation.

Conversely, it goes without saying that you would have to trust us if you were to help us achieve our objective.

Therefore, I put it to you that the building of trust between the police and the media is not just something that is desirable in the administrative sense. It could go a lot further than that.

For example, in a terrorist incident that trust could be instrumental in saving human lives.

What better reason could there be to continue working on building the relationship between the police and the media?

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

On Monday, 19 January 1981, the death occurred in Woomera Hospital of Protective Service Constable Malcolm Peter MARSH, aged 26, after a long illness. He is sadly missed by his family, his many friends and his AFP colleagues.

On the 9 November 1980 Malcolm left this country to seek expert medical treatment in Mexico, returning home shortly before Christmas. Before his departure a Division-wide appeal was launched to render every possible financial assistance to Malcolm in regard to travel, accommodation and medical costs,

and to assist his wife in maintaining the family.

The good people of Woomera, including Australian and United States servicemen and civilians, responded with astonishing generosity for which I have already publicly expressed gratitude.

On behalf of Mrs Marsh I would like now to express heartfelt gratitude to the members of the Central Division, Darwin, Alice Springs, Woomera, Port Augusta, Salisbury, Railway Squad and all those attached to Divisional Headquarters, for their kindness and generosity in supporting the appeal.

I would also like to thank our Welfare Adviser in Canberra, Mr Brian Kelly, whose interest and advice, albeit from afar, were much appreciated; and of course our own Divisional Welfare Officer, Sergeant Ron Jeffree, for his hard work and organisational skill in connection with the appeal.

Once again, our heartfelt thanks.

Yours sincerely,  
PETER COOPER  
Protective Service Sergeant,  
Woomera Station.

See obituary page 26 — Editor.