

A QUESTION OF SECURITY

WHAT do you do when you are the police officer in charge of a car carrying an extra important VIP and a terrorist pulls alongside and tosses a bomb into the car with you?

The answer: It should never happen if you are alert. What's more, the car window shouldn't be open, anyway.

Eighteen AFP officers from around Australia and two officers from the Victoria and Queensland Police Forces recently learned this lesson the hard way during a no-holds-barred VIP protection course.

All completed the course a lot wiser than when they started, according to course co-ordinator Station Sergeant Jack Thurgar.

"It's these types of incidents that provide valuable learning experiences," he said. "Once bitten, twice shy is a very true saying."

The course, lasting nearly a month, took the participants through all aspects of VIP protection in simulated situations. Part of the training was done in Canberra's diplomatic VIP atmosphere and the rest in Sydney's concentrated population environment.

Station Sergeant Thurgar said all members had mastered a wide variety of skills necessary for VIP protection personnel, as well as undergoing a specialist driver training course conducted by Driver Training staff.

"These skills included VIP protection, walk-about procedures, motorcade drills,

how to extract a person from a high risk situation, communications, weapons training, numerous case studies and strenuous physical fitness routines," Station Sergeant Thurgar said.

"Two major simulated operational exercises were incorporated into protection requirements for a high-powered Heads of State conference, and the second with a visit to Australia from a Prime Minister of a fictitious South-West Pacific country."

Station Sergeant Thurgar said the exercises were made as realistic as possible.

"We pulled last-minute changes of itineraries and made other switches to test the individual initiative of every course member," he said. "It worked wonders."

Station Sergeant Thurgar said the 'left-behind' prize for the course went to a Sergeant who had to hire a taxi to catch up with his team after the "VIP" they were minding changed plans and he was left behind.

EDITOR'S NOTE: And the AFP has plenty of independent testimony to our level of professionalism. After the recent visit to Canberra by American Secretary of State Mr George Shultz, American Embassy staff and members of Mr Shultz's party said the motorcades for the visit were "the best they had come across anywhere in the world" (See Letters, Page 24).

CRIME RESPONSE IN ACTION

A special new unit, known as the Crime Response Team, has been making its presence felt in Melbourne.

The team, consisting of two shifts of two uniform officers, was set up earlier this year to take some of the pressure off the Criminal Investigation Branch.

CIB members were frequently being called away from major investigations to respond to immediate minor inquiries. The new team has solved this problem.

The Crime Response Team is independently operated by the General Duties uniform branch and responds to calls for immediate police action at Commonwealth Departments.

On arrival, team members either follow inquiries to their completion, or if the incident appears to be a major one, they take care of the relevant paperwork and pass on the information to the CIB.

When not on response calls, members make other minor investigations and cheque inquiries, execute warrants and give assistance to other officers requiring back-up.

The team has already brought to light a number of benefits stemming from its establishment. Besides meeting a special requirement within the AFP, it is satisfying complainant departments who feel that the mere presence of uniform members may at times be enough to deter possible trouble.

The general public also is now becoming more aware of the AFP uniform branch in Melbourne and the old impression of the AFP as an "FBI" is disappearing.

Apart from the operational advantages of the team, a number of personal advantages are being felt by members, such as an upgrading of work satisfaction as well as further experience in the field of criminal investigation and related paperwork.

The arrangement also enables senior officers to identify the most enthusiastic members of the general duties branch and assists in the selection of the most suitable members for the criminal investigation area.

