

Exercise Garden State sharpens police media skills

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Two terrorists and a hostage died in an outer Melbourne suburb on April 3 when the terrorists detonated several 44 gallon drums containing explosives in an apparent protest against toxic waste dumping.

This incident did not make the six o'clock news nor the morning newspapers for a very good reason. It was the centrepiece of a four-day anti-terrorist exercise starting on April 3 and hosted by the Victoria Police.

Code named 'Exercise Garden State' this exercise was held under the authority of the Standing Advisory Committee on Commonwealth/State Co-operation for Protection Against Violence (SAC-PAV), and was my introduction to SAC-PAV requiring four days of intense role playing as part of the pseudo media pack following the story.

The objective of a SAC-PAV exercise is to assess the capability of the hosting police service to deal with the media in the event of a major terrorist incident, including response to the public through the media. This includes co-operation between state and territory police services and government agencies.

Exercise Garden State began with a all-day forum designed to give those who had not been to a SAC-PAV exercise before, an introduction to the methodologies used and explanations of the role-playing required from the participants. Previous exercises were discussed and each jurisdiction gave reports on major incidents dealt with during the previous 12 months.

Day one of the exercise began on a cold Melbourne morning at an abandoned warehouse in Clayton,



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about a 45-minute drive from the city centre.

An MSS security guard at the gate of the warehouse told media that a man had been dragged out of a van at gun point by two masked men. Scouting around the perimeter of the warehouse, the man was discovered tied to a number of 44-gallon drums which appeared to be wired with explosives. Two masked men with weapons were standing guard over the man and both appeared to be very agitated.

After initial reports were issued by the media on the scene, (previously we had been grouped as newspaper and television journalists) television news bulletins were prepared and the first edition of the newspaper for the exercise, the *Garden Guardian* rolled off the presses.

A private television production company was employed by the Victoria Police for the duration of the exercise and provided a comprehensive hourly update on incidents as they occurred.

The newspaper office, exercise control centre (EXCON), the Protective Security Co-ordination Centre (PSCC) in Canberra and the terrorists all had access to these television bulletins, as would be the case in a real news situation.

As the day unfolded it was revealed the hostage had been 'carjacked' at gun point on the Gippsland Highway at about 5.30am. It was also revealed the hostage was a high-ranking official in

the (fictitious) Bardyan consulate. The purpose of his abduction was that the people of (fictitious) Drinia wanted to make the rest of Australia aware that Bardya was using Drinia as a dumping ground for toxic waste.

At about the same time as the media became aware of the siege in Carlton, a group of Drinian protesters took over the foyer of the Bardyan consulate in Swanston Street in the city centre.

Later on in the day, the terrorists in Carlton blew up the hostage and themselves. When the protesters at the Bardyan consulate became aware of this, the peaceful demonstration turned into another siege. Only the most militant protesters remained with hostages from the consulate and a number of members of the public who happened to be in the consulate at the time.

Our instruction as pseudo media was to exert as much realistic pressure on the Victoria Police media liaison office as possible. Although we could not duplicate the deluge of media interest that such an incident would generate, our media backgrounds gave us additional insights into the sorts of questions to ask and the pressures to exert on the authorities involved.

Playing the role of reporters gave the police media officers involved an appreciation of what problems working journalists come up against in these situations.

Of course it is never possible in an exercise to completely replicate procedures as they would occur in reality. There were a number of equipment failures and lack of operating expertise which would not normally be the case in a real media environment. For example we had no access to a police radio scanner and it took the delivery of three fax machines before we had one which worked adequately.

At the completion of the exercise, Jane Munday, Corporate Communications Director for the Northern Territory Police provided the Victoria Police with a detailed analysis of what went right and what went wrong.

The lessons so learned are taken into consideration and passed onto the police service hosting the next SAC-PAV exercise. In so doing, police media liaison skills are continually sharpened so that in the event of an actual terrorist incident, the public can remain informed in the most suitable manner.