



JON RECOUNTS A RECENT PHOTO-SHOOT FOR ISSUE TWO OF ESP'S NEW OZBASE MAGAZINE SERIES THE 'WEST AUSTRALIAN POLICE'. HERE JON AND ALEXIS COVER A TRAINING SCENARIO FOR THE UPCOMING CHOGM EVENT IN OCTOBER OF THIS YEAR.

WORDS by Jon **PHOTOS** by Jon, Alexis & Conal

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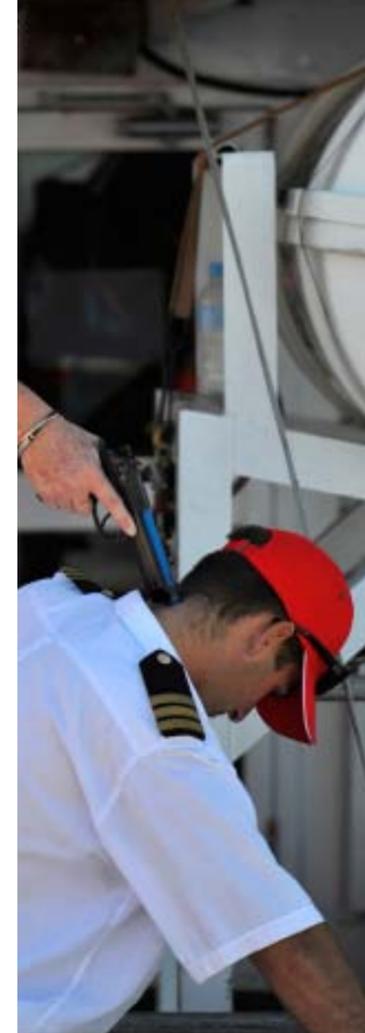
zBase' offers us some pretty amazing photographic opportunities and challenges, and our current issue for the Western Australia Police (WAPOL) is no exception. Each issue of OzBase portrays up to 40 elements within an organization or operational centre. Today we were to cover the Tactical Response Group (TRG), as they went to the aid of the Rottneest Inter-island ferry that had been taken over by terrorists. The TRG has to undergo on-going, realistic training in order to counter any perceived threat. Today, a group of 30 or so media guests - played

by fresh faced students from the WA Police Academy - would be on board covering part of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to be held in October this year. During the crossing a couple from the group would stage an armed take over of the vessel and make their intentions known to the authorities. The subsequent negotiations between the terrorists and the authorities, somehow had to be stalled enough for the TRG to hopefully neutralize the 'baddies'.

On board the 'media' knew 'something' was in store for them but were not sure what. The ferry company had agreed to the scenario but again the crew really



ABOVE: THE FIRE SHIP DOUSING THE BLAZE
LEFT: A GRAPHIC WARNING TO THE TRAILING POLICE BOATS NOT TO APPROACH!
OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE: ALEXIS IN THE R44 SHOOTING THE TWO APPROACHING TRG RHIBS. A FERRY CREW MEMBER PONDERES HIS IMMEDIATE FUTURE. A TERRORIST DECIDES WHAT TO DO NEXT. >>



had no idea what was going to take place. The only information from the instructors was that 'you may get wet!' and 'there are life vests for those who can't swim!'

I was covering the on-board action, whilst Alexis would be following the days progress from the air, shooting from an R44 helicopter capturing how the TRG in their RHIBS, were going to overpower the terrorists. Our assistant Conal was in one of the Police boats recording the interface between them and the ferry.

A fanatical faction taking over a public ferry in Western Australia, packed with innocent sightseers, or in this case media guests, is perceived as a very real scenario. The security involved to counter the threat to a major international event like CHOGM is huge, therefore every possible scenario, by every security asset has to be played out with accuracy and realism.

The ferry duly left Fremantle's Rouse Head Terminal at 0900 with the WAPOL students plus the ships crew. I knew terrorists were going to overpower the crew and take over the ship, but I did not know who they were. So I was not sure where to position my camera. About 30 minutes out, a planned on-board fire broke out, and smoke billowed out from a bucket at the back of the ferry. I figured this was probably a planned cover, and the perfect time for the terrorists to strike, so I switched between the interior and aft deck and waited for events to unfold, hoping I would catch the terrorists taking

over. A fire-ship came alongside spraying a massive jet of water to put out the fire. It was such an impressive sight that I spent too much time watching it. When I went back inside the terrorists were already pointing weapons and yelling instructions. What an idiot, I fell for the cover! they were quick! 'Sit still and nobody will get hurt, we have taken over the ship. I want all your mobile phones out NOW!'

One of the students thought it was quite funny, though in reality she was simply nervous. Don't they teach you anything at the international college for terrorism and ship capture? As an example to the rest, she was singled out, with a gun to her head and forcibly marched out to the aft-deck. 'You, smiley! .. you think this is a f..... joke? GET YOUR UGLY ASS OVER HERE NOW!' They did not mince words, though to me her ass certainly was not ugly!

It was interesting seeing everyone's expressions change from smiling and happy to 'what the ...?' It was starting to sink in, this was real. The same went for the ships crew who were chatting and grinning, they were singled out as well. Nobody was exempt, apart from the instructors and your humble photojournalist of course, who thank god all wore orange high-vis vests.

Soon the Water Police could be seen taking an interest, with a number of boats scurrying about either side of the ferry. Whenever they got too close, one of the terrorists would take a hostage outside, and with a



<< THAT LOOK OF RESIGNATION WHEN FACED WITH THE REALIZATION THAT YOU ARE NOW A HOSTAGE. TRG MEMBERS WATCH OVER A CAPTURED TERRORIST. A PASSENGER BEING MADE AN EXAMPLE OF.



OPPOSITE TOP TO
BOTTOM:
THE TRG ARRIVE.
ALEXIS LOW AND CLOSE
TO A SPEEDING RHIB.
ALEXIS DIRECTING FROM
OUR OFFICE.
ARMED TRG IN THEIR
RHIB APPROACH THE
FERRY.
ABOVE: A TERRORIST
WATCHES FOR ANY
DISRUPTION FROM HIS
HOSTAGES.
FOLLOWING PAGE:
FREEDOM! BOARDING
THE LIFE-RAFT AFTER
JUMPING FROM THE
FERRY.

gun to their head, would 'present' the victim to the nearby Police vessel. Meaning, get any closer buddy and this quivering hostage will have their brains scattered across the deck. Even though I could not see snipers on the Police boat, I'm sure that every time a hostage was taken outside, that the head of the terrorist was centered in the cross hairs of a rifle scope.

The point always got through and the Police vessel very quickly backed off. This went on for most of the morning, while negotiations between the terrorists and the authorities went on, each trying to get the upper hand. Inside, anyone who cracked a smile, talked or in any way looked like they thought the terrorists were not serious, were singled out and made to do 50 push ups. So after a while, silence pervaded, eyes got heavy and people started drifting, including your faithful correspondent. A quick thump on the arm by a passing terrorist and I was jolted awake.

Looking out the back of the ferry I could see Alexis in the red Robbie weaving in and out of the wakes from two speeding RHIBs, preparing for the marine assault on the ferry. One minute there was open sea and the distant horizon, the next, white wakes from a number of speeding RHIBs, weaving and advancing very quickly. Where the heck did they come from? They just seemed to materialize out of thin airt was now only a matter of time before the TRG stormed the ferry. At this point the terrorists knew there was not much they could do. Sure they could waste a few hostages to make a point, but there was very little reason now. As soon as the TRG got on board they would be killed outright, or have to surrender. The other option of course was to blow the ferry up, including themselves. But I was told that 'the snipers' would have taken the terrorists out if this was going to be an option. Okay, so they were there.

At sea there was nowhere for them to run to, and any organized backup they had would have been visible for miles and stopped in their tracks.

Once the RHIBs were alongside all hell broke loose. The TRG stormed the ferry from all sides and from above. In my mind the only logical thing to do was to surrender, and that's exactly what these sensible terrorists did.

Dressed in 'cams', helmets, goggles, coms, heavy assault gear and automatic rifles, the TRG rapidly took control of the situation with



very clear instructions and ultimate authority. The terrorists were overpowered quickly, yet treated with respect. Actually they were lying face down on the carpet of a rolling ferry, with an automatic weapon at their heads. Still, they were alive. All the hostages were marched to the exists with their hands on their heads.

And here was where the afore mentioned 'getting wet' bit kicked in. In order to get the hostages on to the Police boats, everyone had to jump from about 4 meters into the ocean to get to the inflated life-rafts that had been dropped overboard.

It was quite a smooth operation really considering. It took about 30 minutes for the TRG to get 40 or so frightened

people out of a ferry at sea, dump them in the ocean, then haul them into liferafts and finally to safety. Once on board the liferafts, everyone was taken away to the waiting Police boats to dry land. There they would be debriefed for their version of what happened.

All in all, it was an interesting day as a photographer. I guess someone just has to do these things.

Joking aside, the point was that it gave everyone, me included, a better appreciation for what it would be like to be caught in a situation like this.

What's more, it could happen here. ©

Jon Davison