

Hostages taken in the ACT

By Brian Swift

ALMOST 200 members of ACT Region of the Australian Federal Police were involved in an exercise in Canberra during October designed to practise the National Anti-Terrorist Plan.

Exercise Brinda Bella was held over two days at the now-deserted site of an amusement park once called Canberry Fair.

Working in 12 hour shifts, the police and several other people from a variety of government agencies, attempted to negotiate the release of "hostages" taken by "terrorists" following the notional fatal shooting of a police sergeant at the Canberra Race Course.

Conducted under the guidance of the Protective Services Coordination Centre (a division of the Attorney General's Department) Brinda Bella was the first POLEX counter-terrorist exercise arranged in the ACT as part of the training program organised by the Standing Advisory Committee for Protection Against Violence (SAC-PAV).

Joint Directors of Exercise Brinda Bella were the Chief Police Officer of the ACT Region, Assistant Commissioner Peter Dawson; and the head of the PSCC, Mr Kevin Rogers.

Chief Controller was Acting Commander Brian Brinkler.

The general objective of the exercise was for all participating agencies to practise joint response and integrated command and control arrangements for responding to a terrorist incident.

In practising operational command and control and terrorist incident management, the AFP deployed, established and maintained a police forward command post and a police operations centre with all specialist support units.

The adequacy and suitability of police specialist equipment, including communications and technical unit equipment was also tested during the exercise.

On the human resources front, Brinda Bella presented the opportunity to practise and assess procedures for the conduct and control of negotiations with terrorists.

Practical assessments were also conducted on procedures for the establishment and control of



Special Operations team members discussing approach routes to the stronghold during Exercise Brinda Bella. Photo: Branko Ivanovic, AFP.

intelligence units, the preparation and dissemination of assessments and reports, the conduct and control of technical intelligence gathering operations and the planning and procedures for the surrender and reception of terrorists and hostages.

Due to the restricted nature of SAC-PAV exercises, we cannot go into much detail about the exercise scenario or how it was conducted, but we can give you a broad idea of what happened.

On day one an incident occurred at the Canberra Race Course which ended in a shooting between police and some unidentified persons. A police sergeant was fatally wounded. In returning fire, other police shot and killed an offender.

Survivors of the incident left the scene, taking a number of foreign hostages. They were later spotted entering the Canberry Fair complex where they took some Australian hostages.

The terrorists established a stronghold in one of the buildings and made demands on the police and a foreign government.

All appropriate police and govern-

ment agencies were then brought into the incident and negotiations with the terrorists began.

To re-inforce their demands, the terrorists wounded a hostage who was later released but died from wounds. They later wounded another hostage but kept her in custody.

Police negotiators eventually convinced one of the terrorists to surrender and free the hostages while the ring-leader was sleeping.

In the meantime, the police assault group was on stand-by in case a non-violent resolution failed to secure the release of hostages.

When the defecting terrorist left the stronghold, his leader opened fire, killing him and two hostages. The assault group then put its emergency action plan into practise and "stormed" the stronghold, freeing the hostages and killing the remaining terrorists.

Planners, controllers, participants and observers all agreed that the exercise achieved its aims and that the AFP in the ACT was given a thorough test of its responsibilities and capabilities under the National Anti-Terrorist Plan.