



Pic Sgt John Coombe

TAG - EAST

THE 4RAR (CDO) TACTICAL ASSAULT GROUP - EAST IS FULLY OPERATIONAL AND READY TO MEET THE TERRORIST THREAT....

STORY BY J.H.FARRELL

THE Bali bombing and the 9/11 attacks in the United States have finally focused the attention of the Australian public on the danger posed by radical Islamic groups and their terrorist tactics.

21st Century chaos has come home to Australia in a big way. The new threat wears no uniform and has no army or mass production factories. It comes in many forms of religious mania, drug trafficking, organised crime and warlordism.

While Australia is safe from African and Asian style warlordism in the near term, radical Islamic factions have singled us out as an important target for Jihad and have now fired the first shots in their dream of a mighty clash between Islam and what they term 'the followers of Satan' (which is everyone who is not a fanatical fundamentalist dedicated to their interpretation of Islam).

Despite some misinformed criticisms to the contrary, the Australian Defence Force has been quietly increasing its Counter Terrorist (CT)

capability for more than five years in response to the growing non-conventional threats to this country.

While many refused to recognise the rising threat from revolutionary and fundamentalist groups, the ADF set about a major upgrade of its intelligence gathering, nuclear, biological, chemical, radiological and explosive incident reaction and lethal response capabilities to plug as many holes in Australia's defences as possible before the madmen chose to strike us.

Part of this response has been the Army's recent doubling of the Counter Terrorist Tactical Assault Group force with the operational debut of TAG-East now the first response unit for a Terrorist event along the eastern seaboard.

THE THREAT

Terrorism has become the warfare of choice for many minority groups and revolutionary causes precisely because it is so difficult to defend

against. It is war waged by proxy, against civil targets by non-military forces.

It is designed to damage through creating fear and insecurity within the general population of the target country. This insecurity in turn affects the economic and social base of the target which reduces its ability to effectively resist the demands of the terrorists.

It may be gutless, but it is very cheap and until recently it has been quite safe. A terrorist group can wage war on a country without having war waged on it.

Terrorism is deniable, and forces the defender to react within peace time ROEs or worse, within the legal system's checks and balances. A madman can kill 100 Aussies in a Bali club and only face a slightly more severe punishment than an idiot who kills his mate in a drunken bar room brawl. It is truly war by other means.

It is called Dissimilar Warfare in modern MILSpeak, but there is nothing new about it. Every roving band of Mongol or Hun horsemen knew its tactics 1000 years ago.

What has changed in the past 100 years are the tools at the terrorist's disposal. The days of raising frontier settlements and putting the settlers to sword have given way to mass terrorism in the big cities or humiliating a Great Power by taking its citizens hostage and executing them one by one.

Modern terrorism is aimed at inducing massive media coverage showing the relative inability of Governments to defend their citizens from determined fanatics.

It hopes to build a sense of powerless vulnerability in the civilian population. It is made to make the many give in to the demands of a mad few who could never achieve their aims in open political dialogue.

Countering this threat is one of the real quandaries facing modern Defence Forces. Since the problem first raised its ugly head in the 1970s, great strides have been made in combating some terror tactics.

The greatest success has occurred in combating armed fanatics and



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Left: 4RAR Commando CT Operators prepare for a Method of Entry (MOE) training assault.

Above: 4RAR TAG members armed with MP-5s and handguns pose for a publicity shot.

Right: A TAG-E sniper aims an SR-98 during training.

Below: Staged shot of TAG-East Operators conducting a fire stair MOE exercise.



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Nice staged shot of a 4RAR TAG-East CT Team fragment showing standard CQB uniforms, weapons and equipment.

hostage situations.

The development of evolved Close Quarter Battle (CQB) techniques has effectively taken the fight to the terrorists. With super fitness, constant training and the best of equipment - a highly motivated Tactical Assault Team can seize the initiative and save the day and hopefully rescue the innocent.

FIRST A BIT OF HISTORY

Australia raised its CT capability in 1979 in the wake of the bombing of Sydney's Hilton Hotel during a CHOGM meeting. A number of workers were killed in the blast, but the bomb signalled loudly that Australia was not immune to political violence.

The then Fraser Government charged the SASR, Australia's only Special Operations unit at the time, with developing a cutting edge hostage recovery capability after a proliferation of aircraft hijackings and hostage sieges in Europe and the Middle East.

The first TAG became operational in May 1980 almost to the day that the Brit SAS stormed the Iranian Embassy in London to release hostages taken by terrorists.

The original CT capability included both a conventional TAG and an Offshore Assault Team (OAT) tasked with protecting Australia's offshore assets.

In the early days, the SASR made do with scratch built training complexes but over the years significant investments were made to provide the SAS with outstanding training facilities and ranges including the Brigade Special Training Facilities (MOUT) at Bindoon and the 360

degree range complex and full scale Boeing 747 mockup.

The SASR maintained the role exclusively for two decades, making great strides in QCB procedures and infiltration methods.

The quality of the SASR's assault teams was second to none, but their home base in Perth was a long way from the heavily populated East Coast.

Because of the vast investment in training facilities at Swanbourne and Bindoon and the resident status of the SASR in Perth it was not practical for the Toothpullers to pack up and move East. The obvious answer to the problem was another TAG on the East Coast but the funding was not there.

Politicians can be experts at ignoring defence problems until the problem explodes in their faces, but the impending Sydney Olympics and the known terrorist threat to the event spurred the Government into action and major investments were made in equipment and training in the mid to late 1990s.

The Olympic related spending was a one off, but the effort produced a major improvement in Australia's CT capability and preparedness. It also produced a new generation of Counter Terrorist leadership that had been exposed to the most forward thinking about CT from around the world.

One of the first things to change was the geographic spread of CT capability which had been entirely resident in Western Australia - seven hours flying time from the bulk of the population and the most likely site of any terrorist action.

The ADF had fielded two TAGs to cope with special events in the past, but lack of funding and the pressure of maintaining two cutting edge response units was damaging other important skills maintained by the SASR.

After years of arguing, the decision was made to expand CT capability by raising a second, independent, TAG drawn from 4RAR Commando which would become Australia's first line of defence in an armed militant attack.

COMMANDOS

In 1996, the Army directed that the then 2nd/4th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment delink, with 2RAR coming up to full strength as part of the Townsville based 3 Brigade and 4RAR moving to Holsworthy Barracks in western Sydney where it would evolve into a Commando Battalion and part of the Special Forces Group.

4RAR's Commando role was primarily Special Action tasks with an emphasis on parachute insertion and water Ops, but the battalion was in name only with less than 200 personnel on strength.

A common Special Forces Group entry course was eventually instituted and large numbers of Operators from the Perth based Special Air Service Regiment were transferred.

By the time East Timor exploded in September 1999, 4RAR (Cdo) had begun a major metamorphosis and was evolving into a true Special Action Strike Force.

Commandos from 4RAR deployed with INTERFET in the VIP close protection role with 1 Media Support Unit and as interpreters throughout the Australian manoeuvre units.

The scale of ADF Operations in East Timor disrupted many ADF programs and 4RAR soon found itself being bulked out for a conventional tour of East Timor - retraining in the complex art of peace making in low intensity Operations.

Hundreds of new soldiers were taken on strength and 4RAR joined with Cavalry, aviation and support elements which deployed to the ET border region in April 2001.

In East Timor 4RAR (Cdo) fielded four light infantry companies, a support company and a headquarters element. The Commandos maintained the ADF's tight grip on border security throughout the 2001 Dry Season but the Militia was unwilling to play the game after being thoroughly slapped around by 6RAR in the previous campaigning season.

While Timor had been quiet, the Commandos were about to hit the bigtime. Plans to turn 4RAR (Cdo) into a first rate Special Action Force were in full swing.

On return from East Timor in October 2001, the battalion remade itself. New equipment, new state of the art training facilities and an expanded training budget were introduced.

4RAR's new structure was a Spec Ops capable Regimental Headquarters, two Commando Companies, a Base Company (administration and support) and a Support Company with mortar, heavy weapons and Special Reconnaissance elements.

While the Special Air Service Regiment's war role is primarily Special Reconnaissance (deep penetration covert surveillance) and Special Warfare (raising and training indigenous forces), 4RAR (Cdo)'s role was to be more aggressive with an emphasis on maritime raiding and airborne



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A TAG-East Commando takes a breaking tool to a window during Method of Entry demonstrations at the Holsworthy complex assault.

At the same time Counter Terrorism training was introduced, and the battalion re-equipped with the tools used in Counter Terrorism.

Part of the reorganisation was the tasking of the battalion to maintain a fully operational Tactical Assault Group, codenamed TAG -East, to deal with armed political violence to complement the existing TAG manned by the SASR.

The size and specs of a Tactical Assault Group are classified for good reason, but in general teams a TAG is a group of small teams of highly drilled Operators expert in Close Quarter Battle (CQB) and the myriad infiltration skills necessary in dealing with Special Recovery missions.

TAG-East also contains a detachment of 13 RAN Clearance Divers to beef out the Group's littoral warfare and offshore recovery capabilities.

4RAR's TAG - East, became fully operational in September 2002 - 22 years after the original SASR TAG went on line.

NEW TOOLS FOR THE CQB TRADE

Part of the establishment of TAG-East was the block re-equipping of the Commando Battalion. Standard issue F-88A1 and F-89A1 variants remain in the armoury, but quantities of the latest generation M-4A5 Carbine were acquired to equip the bulk of Operators alongside the shortened ParaSAW variant of the Minimi with a short barrel and folding stock.

While producing much the same firepower as a standard F-88A1, the

flexible M-4A5 carbine is fully modular and optimised for Spec Ops. Numerous mounting points allow an Operator to mix and match accessories including optics, aiming designators, grenade launchers and suppressors. The M-4 is also reputed to have an advantage over the Steyr in riverine and maritime environments due to its low technology bolt and gas system which does not suffer from hydraulic seizure if fired full of water.

For urban CQB and hostage situations, the latest production models of the venerable Heckler and Koch MP-5 family of machine pistols were issued. The MP-5 family is now a little long in the tooth, but it is still the preferred CQB weapon with every major Special Operations force.

The H&Ks are favoured because the pistol rounds they fire are designed not to exit the body of the target, making it a far safer weapon to use particularly in hostage situations or where bullets could pass through walls or floors to injure fellow TAG members or innocent bystanders caught up in the action.

The latest generation 9mm pistols which come with a complete range of CQB accessories are also on issue for TAG Operators. Remington 870 12 gauge riotguns add a solid sledgehammer to the 9mm pistols and SMGs.

TAG load bearing equipment including specialist combat vests customised to carry a range of grenades, breaking tools and plenty of spare mags are standard issue. Pistols and spare mags are slung on thigh

down holsters to allow instant access in every scenario.

Because CQB is rich in gas and explosive charges, the Operators wear special suits designed to protect the skin from chemicals and the burning flash from the entry explosives and stun grenades used to pacify terrorist targets.

The modified helmets on issue are soon to be replaced with an integrated assault helmet package which will contain high tech personal radios and in future data streaming capability.

Sniping platforms include the current issue SR-98 and Accuracy International's X-18. The AW50 Sniping System will be introduced in 2003.

Current acquisition projects will soon see a new man portable direct fire guided weapon to replace the M-72 and 84mm RCL, a lightweight very low level air defence missile and customised commercial vehicles to operate covertly in urban environments.

Other equipment on the way includes: specialist ammunition, demolition and breaching equipment, thermal imaging sighting systems, thermal binoculars, strategic satellite communications links, new tactical comms and organic data sourcing of situational awareness information, a counter surveillance and avoidance system, an Identity Friend or Foe (IFF) system and an enhanced assault helmet.

To top off the new gear, next generation training facilities have been built at Holsworthy Barracks including a new Military Operations over Urban Terrain (MOUT) complex, an aircraft mockup range, a 360 degree range (Killing House) and a water operations training centre.

The high quality training facilities will be used by other NSW based units when not required to keep 4RAR's Operators sharp.



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