

Two-Officer Team Tactics

By Senior Constable Tim Bowen, with Sergeant Greg Martin. Photos courtesy of Dave Douglas & Greg Martin.

I think every police officer who has been involved in a high risk situation where Tasers or Glocks have been drawn by their fellow officers has experienced that momentary feeling of dread when they wonder if one of those weapons is inadvertently being pointed at them.

I know I have, and I'm sure we've all seen glimpses of it actually happening on the six o'clock news bulletins. It tends to make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up, doesn't it?

Here's the thing. Most of us work in a team of two, right? Be it General Duties, Tactical Crime Squads, Plain Clothes units, or whatever. Law enforcement officers spend most of their time working with a partner, and it's not uncommon to have a different partner every shift. So if we work in pairs, how come we do our firearms training as individuals?

American police departments identified this shortfall in their training many years ago, and firearms training was introduced specifically aimed at the two- and four-officer team to

address it. I decided I'd like to know a little more about this training.

'WHAT THE HELL HAVE YOU GOT ME INTO THIS TIME, TIM?'

Late last year, Sergeant Greg Martin and I found ourselves with three other Aussie Senior Firearms Instructors (SFIs) on the other side of the Pacific, staring at our watches, realising that

We were on our way to day one of a three day Two-Officer Team Tactics course run by Max Joseph, the founder and director of Tactical Firearms Training Team (TFTT).

This was the fourth self-funded trip to the US of A for Greg and I, and was the culmination of almost 12 months of planning to attend several courses.

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we were going to be at least half an hour late to the Burro Canyon Shooting Park, located in the hills just north of Los Angeles.

From our past experience at all the premier firearms training facilities we have attended, we knew that the instructors expect punctuality, as





Max carefully controls movement through his 'kill house'.



The competition brought some serious firepower, and let us use it!

these guys run long days with plenty of trigger time.

More importantly, after much correspondence and phone calls prior to our travelling to the US, Max had manipulated his yearly training schedule specifically to have this course run for us in Los Angeles. And we were going to be late!

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Senior Constable Matt Lewis mentioned in a previous article (on pages 44-47 of the March 2012 *Police Journal*) that Dave Douglas, a retired Sergeant and Range Master from the San Diego Police Department, had coordinated our firearms and equipment needs.

I could see most of the Federal ammunition stacked in the back of Dave's SUV as we followed him along the mountain road towards the range. I was looking forward to using the Smith and Wesson M&P .40 calibre semi-autos again, as they are, in my opinion, what the Glock should have evolved to after all this time in manufacture.

Finally arriving at about 7.30am, we parked beside a number of marked and unmarked police vehicles. We then set about doing what most people do on the first day of any course—we checked out the competition.

We watched nervously as the Chula Vista SWAT officers loaded their FN P90 sub machine guns, and as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer tried to decide between his AK47 variant or highly modified shotgun.

Other police officers present went about choosing which light/laser/optic combo to use on their M4 carbines, and two civilian trauma surgeons pulled out some expensive weapons from the boot of their car. This did little to ease our nerves.

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We introduced ourselves to Max, who immediately put us to work setting up his range with steel targets. He also issued us with the tactical body armour we would be required to wear for the duration of the course (this is mandatory on many American ranges).

As we all trudged up the embankment carrying the heavy steel targets, I

heard Greg whisper, 'What the hell have you got me into this time, Tim?'

'GOOD MORNING, MEN. MY NAME IS MAX JOSEPH, AND I'LL BE YOUR PRIMARY INSTRUCTOR FOR THE DAY.'

With the range set up, we were all herded into a small demountable office that was to be our lecture room for the next three days. Max stood in front of us and said, 'Good morning, men. My name is Max Joseph, and I'll be your primary instructor for the day.' This was how Max started each day, which is a testament to Max's professionalism, and his Marine Corps training.

Max gave a brief account of his tactical background, which included serving in Reconnaissance Companies with the

Marine Corps at the rank of Sergeant. Max subsequently left to found TFFT and was previously involved with the Tactical Explosive Entry School (TEES). He has continued training and working in special operations with the US military and law enforcement. If ever you need to know what the term 'command presence' means, Max Joseph epitomises it.

After everyone in the room introduced themselves, Max outlined how the next three days would run, and provided the obligatory safety brief and detailed safety rules. We moved to the range and a review of each student's personal skills, accuracy, and ability with a weapon was conducted by Max.

“Most American instructors nervously observe Aussies, as we are considered by our American brethren to be pin up boys for gun control.”

This is the time most American instructors nervously observe the Aussies, as we are considered by our American brethren to be 'pin up boys for gun control', and as such are not expected to be proficient with weapons.

This view is as a result of the various gun buyback schemes our country has had to endure thanks to our elected officials, and the illegal deeds of a few. Any firearm ownership restriction tends to be big news in the US.

Max spent more than his fair share of time at our Aussie end of the firing line as basic shooting drills were conducted, and in a short time I had the impression that Max was satisfied with our weapons handling skills.

Over the next few days, the Aussies were often called upon to stand in front of Max's class to provide examples for each technique that was taught.

After the basic individual static drills were completed, we were separated into teams of two. Simple tactical verbal communication was introduced, which escalated throughout the remainder of the course.

Each command that we used built on previous commands, as team tactics



The Israeli Battle Dressing is more effective than a Band Aid.



Many hours of close proximity shooting builds confidence.



Does our hire car insurance cover bullet holes?

and movement became the norm on the range.

Following the introduction of verbal communication, position 'Sul' was finally introduced. This was something that we had been waiting for Max to talk about. I had been taught this position in 2005 by Alan Brosnan,

"Position 'Sul' is an ideal position suited to Team Tactics that negates the sweeping of muzzles across other police officers that can occur when working in close proximity."

a former New Zealand Special Air Service member and founder of TEES.

As the story goes, Alan and Max developed the position in 1997 in response to the wild muzzle control of the Brazilian police officers that Alan and Max observed while conducted training for them.

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DAY TWO – 'COVER AND EVACUATE'
Day two commenced with Max having us refresh ourselves on the techniques learnt the day before, accompanied by a lot of verbal communication between the two-officer teams.

The rest of the morning was spent performing two-officer high/low drills, high/low cuts, kneeling, and sidestep drills with each team using carbines, shotguns, and pistols. These drills were repeated until the actions could be performed on demand, as a team, and with 100% safety.

Without going into specifics of these drills, the basis is to allow two officers to work together in close proximity (some techniques requiring the officers to be in physical contact with each other), and to get two weapons onto the threat at the same time.

Two-officer team movement forward and rearward was practised, with each skill building on the last. Contact drills followed, with target discrimination completing the first half of the second day.

The Israeli Battle Dressing and the CAT (Combat Application Tourniquet)

was discussed in detail. Both items have proven themselves invaluable in conflict, and Max was a strong advocate of them.

The Israeli Battle Dressing is the most effective wound dressing I have encountered, and it is also very easy to apply. At about \$5.00 per dressing, it's cheap as well. These dressings should be in every Firearms Range First Aid Kit in Queensland and in the boot of every police vehicle.

Max spoke to us about officer down drills. It was the first time some of us have been confronted by the question, 'What do you do in a fire fight if your

"No damage was caused to the vehicle, although it did take Greg and Matt several days to remove any evidence of the activities, as empty shell casings had managed to enter every crevice of the vehicle."

partner is down?' Although so simple, the phrase 'cover and evacuate' was reinforced to all present, and gave everyone a clear perspective on what to do in the event of an officer being wounded.

DAY THREE – 'YOU WANT DO WHAT WITH OUR HIRE CAR, MAX?'

Day three began with two-officer team building approach, entry, and room clearing. Max had several of

us hammering metal tent pegs into the ground in what appeared to be a random pattern, until he started running orange tape around the pegs. We all watched as the floor plan of a three bedroom house appeared before our eyes.

We spent the morning in the tape house rehearsing the approach, entry, clearing, and domination of the structure in two-officer team formations. This included target discrimination using live fire.

This was repeated until Max was satisfied that we were comfortable with the technique, and we then repeated the exercise in Max's 'kill house'. This involved entering numerous doors, negotiating hallways, and again discriminating between threat and hostage targets using live fire.

Next was tactical withdrawal over open terrain, where forward and rearward bounding overwatch drills were conducted with Max teaching 'The Australian peel', a military technique.

Our Matt was tasked by Max to instruct the class on the updated version of this technique due to

his previous Australian military training. Although suffering a touch of performance anxiety, Matt brought everyone up to speed on the slight modification of that technique.

The second half of the last day was devoted to shooting from a vehicle. Max asked Greg for permission to use our hired Chevrolet Suburban SUV for the live fire component.

Greg responded with a rather curt, 'You want do what with our hire car, Max?' The other four of us interjected and gave Max the go-ahead, seeing as it was only Greg's credit card details and signature on the hire agreement.

A number of shooting drills were practised—shooting from the vehicle in pairs, around the vehicle, and vehicle ambush drills—which concluded the firearms component of the course.

Fortunately, no damage was caused to the vehicle, although it did take Greg and Matt several days to remove any evidence of the activities, as empty shell casings had managed to enter every crevice of the vehicle.

THE WRAP-UP

Operational police will always work in small numbers; we usually work as a two-officer team, and on a good day

with the addition of a backup unit, a four-officer team.

Officers need to know how to work as a cohesive unit, and how to employ team tactics that are safe, effective, and that have been previously taught and rehearsed during training. The benefits to operational safety and survivability of this type of training are undeniable.

Training that focuses on a two-officer team will also assist in bridging the gap between the single officer and the skills required to respond to incidents where larger team tactics are required (for example, law enforcement responses to active shooters).

Let us move from practising shooting at a stationary paper target, and start to replicate the real world situations that we, albeit rarely, may face in

the course of our duties. It is a step towards maximising the safety and effectiveness of all our officers.

Tim Bowen is a Senior Firearms Instructor in the Metro North Region. He has worked in General Duties, Crime Squad, and the Traffic Branch. He has been a Firearms Instructor for over fifteen years and regularly undertakes weapons and tactics training in the US.

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