

Technology in hindsight



Plugging the gaps

Would the events surrounding the Stockwell shooting have turned out differently with the correct application of technology? In this first part of a new series looking at technology in hindsight, we concentrate on the Stockwell shooting and the gaps that could have been plugged with a working digital recording solution. BAPCO Journal speaks with Paul Collins (Director Business Development Public Safety) from CyberTech, a provider of resilient digital recording solutions, about the report by the IPCC, Stockwell One Investigation into the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell underground station on 22 July 2005.

What gaps did you identify in the report?

Voice recording products could have helped greatly in the post incident analysis in particular on who said what to whom. There would have been full traceability. One of the first concerns raised in the IPCC Stockwell One report was that the Designated Senior Officer (DICK) was late to the strategic briefing chaired by Commander MCDOWALL.

Had the briefing room been properly equipped then the briefing would have been recorded and DICK would have known what was said.

It also turned out that although TETRA communications were being recorded, the radio communications of the surveillance teams weren't. Surveillance radios were in use that may not have been TETRA radios.

What would have been the solution?

All voice communications should have been recorded – not only the ones going on inside the command room, but also the ones between the command room and the relevant people involved in the operations on the outside. To help on this task nowadays it is possible to wear simple wireless microphones, such as the ones you can wear on a lapel. Some forces in the UK already operate with that capability.

Additionally, the recordings could have been used to compile the decision logs.

But decision logs were filled out, weren't they?

Yes, but as the Designated Senior Officer DICK told IPCC

investigators, her decision log was not completed until 12 hours after the incident – and that was done by relying on a mixture of memory and brief loggist notes. Not only this leaves the decision log open to interpretation, but also DICK herself could have forgotten relevant details.

A recording solution, which time stamps all recordings, helps in two respects. Firstly it makes people think about their decisions, and secondly it backs up their decisions during post incident analysis.

Generally, recording solutions are not going to change what happens in an incident, although it is common knowledge that some people can behave differently if they know that they are being recorded. However the main reason for having all communications recorded is traceability: it protects officers as well as their targets during enquiries.

Should recording solutions be made mandatory then?

Yes. They are already mandatory in some of the markets we work in, such as the financial markets. Here, brokers use phones for trading, but the FSA stipulates that all trades have to be recorded. We have developed powerful solutions specifically for this market to help financial organisations achieve FSA compliance.

I would see the police going the same way. Recording solutions may not directly save lives, but they can improve processes in further incidents as well as minimise room for misinformation.

On 14 March 2006, the IPCC announced that the first part of the inquiry, known as "Stockwell 1" had been completed and recommendations were passed on to the Metropolitan Police Authority and Crown Prosecution Service, but the report could not be made public until all legal processes had concluded. The report was published on 8 November 2007.

Excerpts from the IPCC Stockwell One report

Command and control: Concern (2)

"Despite being appointed as the Designated Senior Officer, the strategic briefing chaired by Commander McDowall commenced before Commander Dick's arrival due to inaccurate information being provided to her regarding the location of where the briefing was to be held."

Concern (3)

"No formal recording was made of any of the briefings prior to the deployment of firearms and surveillance officers. Thereafter there was no audio recordings of what was communicated within the Operations Room. Such recordings would have provided an audit trail regarding the information that was received by the room and the decisions that were then transmitted."

Recommendation HMIC

"To review existing practice to ensure that at corporate level robust and appropriate facilities and mechanisms exist to maintain the effective command and control of future operations of a similar nature.

"Particular attention should be paid to ensuring that key briefings, strategic and tactical decisions are fully recorded or documented and in any event capable of audit."

Concern (10)

"The completion of the supplementary surveillance log has been proved to involve alterations which changed the meaning of the entry."

Recommendation HMIC

"To review existing policy and practice to ensure that at a corporate level robust facilities and processes exist to demonstrate the integrity of evidence gathered during the course of surveillance operations. Particular attention should be paid to the continued utility of surveillance logs."

The structure and management of communications (20.98)

"The very fact that there was no recording of the communications from SO12 to Room 1600 has not assisted the officers in confirming details of the instructions given during the IPCC investigation."

20.100

"Commander Dick during her interview with the IPCC investigators stated that her decision log was accurate, albeit, it was not completed until 12 hours after the incident. She stated that she relied on her memory, loggist notes and CLIO log. The loggist notes and CLIO log are very brief."

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