



Training builds muscle memory

Keynote opening address by Deputy Chief Constable (retired) Richard Gray and Detective Chief Superintendent Campbell Corrigan: Glasgow Terrorist Incident.

“The incident at Glasgow highlighted several key factors that police forces must remember. Experience, from training and real-life incidents, is vital and will serve you well during an incident.”

➔ Campbell Corrigan.

After 35 years on the force Richard Gray retired in March 2008, but was a central figure during the incident at Glasgow Airport. Richard explained that large-scale events are not rare for Strathclyde as they have to manage sectarian marches on a regular basis, football matches between Rangers and Celtic, and in 2005 the G8 summit was held near Edinburgh. Alongside these examples of live scenarios the force regularly trained for counter-terrorist incidents including the event “Cutty Sark” which provided the emergency services with a series of worst-case scenario situations.

The incident in Glasgow was preceded by a series of failed bomb attacks in London. As soon as this was known Richard explained that the Strathclyde police force began to increase their searches for known potential suspects in the Loch Lomond area and although they were able to trace phone communications between masts in the area, the geography of the area meant they were unable to accurately pinpoint their locations.

June 30th was one of the busiest days of the year at Glasgow airport as it was the first day of the school holiday. Richard played some calls made from the airport, and the information they gave underlined the difficult job in call centres of disseminating different reports into a coherent understanding.

With so many people at the airport, around 4,000, and nine fully loaded planes on the runways, the area needed careful management. By chance a large number of police officers a few miles away covering a march were re-routed to the airport to help maintain a secure site.

Richard reported that although a large number of officers used the Airwave network during the incident it never went above 50 per cent capacity. In the past this could have been an issue but the new Airwave network worked without fault.

Campbell Corrigan took over the second part of the talk – he was the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) at the incident. Having just got back from holiday Campbell admitted it was quite a way to return to work but he was able to focus immediately on the situation at hand

because of the training undertaken by Strathclyde in the past. The phrase, “training builds muscle memory” was used to explain that despite the intensity of the situation and the potential for it to get out of control, training undertaken meant he and other staff on the site were prepared and able to follow procedures correctly.

When the situation was under control and “couldn’t get any worse” the man from the Jeep who had been admitted to a nearby hospital was designated a CBRN risk and the entire hospital had to be evacuated. Resources were stretched further and communication was required between police and ambulance personnel.

While the incident at the airport required communications between BAA, the police and Fire and Rescue teams, Campbell explained the ambulance service did not “come to the table”, and once it was established there were no casualties the ambulance service left the Crisis Management team.

During the night every available floodlight was brought in to help forensics teams and to allow the airport to reopen at 6am. Not only was this an economical reason – each lost flight is around £1 million lost business – but also a sign that terrorism won’t stop everyday life. Within 24 hours the airport was operational again.

With the airport and hospital incidents under control, the police searched the “bomb house” and found huge amounts of potential evidence. At such a delicate stage, officers had been working long shifts in an intense situation but because “training builds muscle memory” they could carry out their jobs correctly and efficiently.

Richard Gray concluded the talk saying, “The incident at Glasgow highlighted several key factors that police forces must remember. Experience, from training and real-life incidents, is vital and will serve you well during an incident. Not only that but communication is vital, although as Campbell outlined, you must be strict in who is given a voice, as some organisations do not need to be represented. You must be resilient to deal with the unexpected, such as the hospital suddenly having to evacuate their patients, and you must be practical.”

Detective Chief Superintendent Campbell Corrigan was the Senior Investigating Officer at Glasgow airport.