

BLUE LINE

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Police bikes controlling demonstrations

Keeping things in balance



Left to Right & Back row to front: Row 1: Cal Traversy; Tony Chambers; Don Howerton; Malcolm McNeigh; Steve Shaw; Darren Foster; Rob Christensen; Roy Fleming; Glen Thompson Row 2: Rob Rothwell; Heidi Schoeberger; Rich Hatchman; Dale Hemm; Gord Schmidke; Randy Inouye; Ron Bieg; Randy Giesbrecht; Mark Burgess Row 3: Paul Hogan; Ray Wong; Scott Meikle; Scott Thomson; Dan Pain; Steve Kempton; Colin Gilmour; Bruce Rhode; Aaron Cramer; Damian Searwar; Ken Frail Row 4: Russ Foster; Chris Graham; Kris Wrathall; Dave Duncan; Jim Patenaude; Jamie Munroe; Ben Wilkinson; Robin Peoples; Alex Clarke; Anna Nagy; Glynnis Griffiths Row 5: Darcy Henkel; Kristin Mutch; Darren Lemke; Jean Prince; Rich Michals; Bert Rainey; Beverly Mitchell; Dennis Morin; Cindy Vance; Jeannie Yee; Ann Fawcett; Insp. Chris Offer; Row 6: Len Smith; Skye Thuli; Jennifer Brooks; Dan O'Donovan; Cam Lawson; Colin McEwen.

by Chris Offer & Bert Rainey



How crowds are controlled is an important aspect of the community policing philosophy. The degree of force used to balance an individual's right to protest and yet guarantee the security of internationally protected persons is a very important

and delicate issue. The Vancouver Police Department recently had an opportunity to prove that bike patrol officers can be used to better achieve that balance.

One of Canada's largest security operations, Asia Pacific Economic Conference 97 (APEC), presented many and varied challenges to the Vancouver Police, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and other partner agencies. The APEC conference brought to Vancouver eighteen heads of state from the Pacific Rim, their support staff and spouses, many of whom have Internationally Protected Person status.

The APEC summit also attracted thousands of journalists as well as diverse groups opposed to the meetings or who wished to protest human rights violations in some of the countries attending the meetings.

Hundreds of police personnel were assigned to meeting sites and hotels during APEC. To meet unforeseen demands for personnel resources the Vancouver Police de-

ployed a sixty-officer bicycle equipped Quick Response Team (QRT) and in doing so showed unequivocally that large groups and belligerent crowds can be managed successfully by bike officers.

The use of the bike patrol was one of the most innovative security strategies used at APEC. Sixty of Vancouver's bike officers are normally assigned to community police offices, patrolling the city's neighbourhoods, beaches and parks, or targeting auto crime and enforcing drug laws. With the announced coming of APEC these resources were assigned for the first time into one Quick Response Team.

The team was organized into four fifteen-person squads with a sergeant in charge and an inspector with overall command. The mandate was to move rapidly to various APEC sites as additional resources were required.

The Bicycle Patrol Coordinator and trainer developed a number of innovative crowd control techniques using bicycles and modified traditional police crowd control tactics for use by bike patrol officers. The bike officers presented a less aggressive impression to the demonstrators and public than that of a Crowd Control Unit.

The bike patrol officer's method of transportation also doubles as a portable fence or crowd barrier. The officers face the crowd in a line holding their bicycles. To form a barrier each bike constable overlaps the front wheel of their bike with the next officer's rear wheel holding the bike

in front. The bike officers are able to restrain a demonstration or push the crowd back with less personnel and with a lower level of force than a line of police without bikes. The reason is the physical and psychological barrier the bicycle represents. The bike increases the personal space between police and demonstrators.

The Vancouver Police also developed a "V" formation used by a team of bikes to open paths for VIPs to gain entry through demonstrators. Using bikes to push people is more effective and psychologically is not as aggressive as being pushed with hands or a baton. The members utilizing this method found the "get your hands off of me" response was replaced with compliance.

The University of British Columbia became the flash point for protestors opposed to APEC with some setting up a tent city on the campus. The bike squad regularly patrolled the campus site in the days before the meeting and built up a relationship with tent protestors which later helped to de-escalate many tense incidents.

The critical test for the crowd control techniques occurred when the eighteen heads of state moved from downtown Vancouver in individual motorcades at two minute intervals to the Museum of Anthropology at UBC for their final meeting. One thousand protestors marched on the security fence after the leaders arrived at the site. Protestors were permitted to approach the fence. OC spray was used by police when a core group started to pull



Parade downtown



Trade and convention centre Vancouver

down the temporary fence. The bike members were in formation on either side of the marchers and moved quickly along with the RCMP personnel to form a line in front of the demonstration moving the protestors away from the fence. Bikes were used to form a barricade to hold the demonstrators back. Only a small group intent on creating an incident and being arrested clashed with police.

In one incident a protestor with chronic breathing problems needed medical attention after being sprayed with OC spray. When bike officers became aware of this the bikes were lifted up and surged forward until the line was past the ailing protestor who then received assistance from Paramedics who were also on bikes and strategically positioned behind the police lines.

This particular clash received considerable national and international media attention. The vast majority of the demonstrators were controlled in a non-violent way without the use of OC spray by the bike squad with the back up of RCMP members on foot. Due to this the Crowd Control Unit, police dogs and horses on stand by were not used to control the crowd.

When protestors began to disperse from the fence area, a core group attempted to enter one of three gates into the secure area. The bike squad set up a barrier of interlocked bicycles in front of the gate. The group then split up in an attempt to block the remaining two routes. In response the bike squad split to cover gates one and two. The third was cleared by RCMP foot personnel for the motorcades to leave.

When the last motorcade departed the QRT bike squads were immediately redeployed to downtown Vancouver to manage a march and rally of 700 protestors. The bikes travelled the eighteen kilometres from the university to the downtown core rapidly despite street closures. The rally was handled without incident even with an arrival of a motorcade a short distance away.

Bike patrol officers demonstrated their value during APEC at other events. China's president Jiang Zemin was spotted by a passing group of about one hundred demonstra-



Vancouver bike patrol officers join with RCMP officers to hold the line.

tors, who were in support of human rights for Tibet, when he was arriving on a non publicized visit to the Vancouver Art Gallery. The ensuing demonstration was not anticipated. The APEC site commander for the Art Gallery called for assistance. The first Bike Sergeant to arrive assessed the situation and requested three squads to attend. The bikes responded through the congested Vancouver traffic and formed a clear path for the departure of the President of China through the demonstrators. Then, with the increased level of protection required, extra RCMP and Vancouver Police personnel on foot arrived to back up the line of bikes. The President and his entourage departed safely to his ten vehicle motorcade.

The bike patrol officers were used to control a large parade when 2,500 people from groups opposed to APEC marched two kilometres through downtown Vancouver to the main venue for the APEC meetings at the Vancouver Trade and Convention Centre. The control of this march fell to the QRT bike squad as all the Vancouver, Victoria Police and RCMP motorcycles were assigned to motorcade escorts. The bike squad members moved ahead of the six block long parade of demonstrators locking down each intersection. Despite not having the motorcycle's ability to squeeze the crowd from three lanes into two to keep some traffic moving the bike officers managed the demonstration from start to destination without incident.

The bikes were also called to a small dem-

onstration at a consulate office when a group of marchers attempted to gain entry to the building. A squad attended and locked all the doorways with their bikes permitting only two people to deliver a letter to the consulate office.

Bike patrol officers trained in crowd control methods offer field commanders another force option to consider as the bikes can be used as barriers and as protection. During APEC most protestors were reluctant to even touch the police bikes. When arrests were made, the suspects were easily pulled between two bikes that were moved aside. Arrested parties can also be controlled by being pulled over the bike. This causes the arrested person to lose balance and become easier to restrain.

Police use of bicycles has expanded rapidly in just a few years and has become central in many department's community policing strategies. The pioneering use of police on bikes at APEC illustrated a significant new area of deployment for bicycles.

Chris Offer is a District Commander with the Vancouver Police and Bert Rainey is the department's bicycle trainer and coordinator. Both were assigned on bicycles during APEC. The authors will be giving a presentation on the use of police bikes for crowd control at the "Police Leadership '98 Conference" in Vancouver, April 15-18, 1998.