

# SAR Exercise Evaluation Report

## Operation POTTER

**Location:** Dunedin

**Date:** 2017

**Report version:** 1

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## 1. Executive Summary

The exercise was built around the integration of 5 organisations.

The aim of the different groups working together worked well and was achieved by mixing up the people in both the field and IMT teams.

The SAREX objectives were all achieved and provided good information for conversations around how the learnings of the exercise can be considered in future training exercises for continued development.

The aspects that went well and those that caused some difficulties both created opportunities for improving future performance.

Exercises like this help to build on the positive bonds between the southern groups and partner organisations that already exist.

## 2. Recommendations

Cold cases can be difficult to build a SAREX around and require some out of the box thinking to engage people's participation. As an organiser you want to avoid the notion there is nothing actually to find, so participants won't give it our full attention or effort.

Create the exercise so that you can scale it up or down when you see what actually turns up. When places are limited for participation on an exercise this sends a negative message to most people and lessens the chance of getting good engagement from groups.

Beware of the skill levels of those participating so that everyone gets a reasonable chance to perform and grow. Participating members should be encouraged to take on roles they wouldn't normally in order to get the chance to develop.

Have a flexible plan that can be quickly altered to maintain the momentum of the event so that people aren't left doing nothing for extended periods of time.

Be aware of the issues that can arise from technology especially if the people using it are still learning to master it. It is important that IMTs and the technical people are aware of both Automation bias and the Paradox of Automation because both of these things will have an ever increasing negative effect on search outcomes if they are not understood and accounted for.

Be clear on what the exercise is aimed at.

Mentoring is a powerful tool and the mentors should be clearly identified before the exercise starts so that those who need mentoring understand that this is what is happening.

Spontaneous volunteers need to be carefully managed. While care needs to be taken around the health and safety parameters of such groups, their utilisation can bring



either a positive or negative spin on the overall search. An IMT simply refusing to acknowledge or use spontaneous volunteers is generally not an option, though on a case by case basis their exclusion can be justified (eg: a disappearance could have a suspicious or criminal overtone). They are often emotionally motivated to be involved, so any tasks given should be meaningful but within their known capabilities. If these groups are not managed, they will often go out and search anyway and can contaminate or destroy opportunities for trained searchers to find clues or identify a direction of travel as well as the possibility some will go directly to the media with negative press about the search.

### 3. Introduction

This exercise was the southern region annual SAREX run by the police and Landsar focusing on Suburban search.

### 4. Background

This exercise was based on a cold case suburban search in which the subject is still missing. On the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Alexandra woman Denise Potter went missing from Carroll Street, Dunedin. She was aged 56yrs. She is believed to have left the address with no money, no cell phone and wearing bare feet or jandals. The area is characterised by a mix of residential dwellings, City Council reserve land and the Otago harbour in very close proximity. An extensive search operation was launched, including urban search of the surrounding area as well as a marine search of the upper harbour and coastline of Dunedin beaches. She has not been located. This search had a high media as well as public interest. The case remains open, but following suspension of the search, the case was referred to the coroner.



## Dates, location, organising agency(s), key people

The exercise was held on over the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> November 2017 in Dunedin organised by the Dunedin Police SAR squad with input from Dunedin LandSAR.

## Participating organisations

The exercise was intended to include a number of local search and rescue organisations as follows:

- Police Search and Rescue
- LandSAR groups from around the Southern Region including Dunedin, Clutha, North Otago, Catlin's, East Otago, Southland, Te Anau and Central Otago Lakes District.
- Dunedin Branch AREC
- Dunedin Surf Life Saving (only involved in the planning process as a marine component was initially part of the exercise).
- Dunedin Branch of Red Cross

## Exercise aim

The aim of the exercise was to bring together all respective SAR practitioners, police and other volunteers from around the region to work together practicing, honing and refreshing their various skill sets and systems and in an urban search environment. Many of our neighbouring search groups get limited opportunity to train or undertake urban searching, but are often frequently being called upon to do so.

## Exercise objectives

There were a number of Objectives for this exercise and a number of exercise injects to create the situations to help test the participants and met the SAREX objective.

They are as follows:

- Effective Risk Identification and Management: *Looking for examples of good briefings, hazard identification, and appointment safety officer and ensuring "take 5 types" team wellness checks.*
- IMT using SARtrack: *Looking for SARtrack to be used as the primary search management tool, incorporated effective use of AU support personnel, SAR track at the op's base as well as at forward operating base and potential of IMT to run dual operations on SARtrack*
- Volunteer Searcher Management: *Looking for effective management and utilisation of groups of spontaneous volunteers when they arrive to assist.*



- **IMT Shift Handover:** *Looking at several injects to ensure effective IMT handovers, change of roles with in IMT, readiness / comfortableness of incoming IMT etc.*
- **Effective Use of CIMS:** *Looking for good IMT set up, identifiable managers that understand their defined roles, good use of forms and charts (IAP's etc.), and good use of terminology and regular progress meetings.*
- **Urban Search Skills Refresher:** *Looking for senior members to lead and teach other SRA members around identification of clues and opportunities for tracking in urban environments.*

### Exercise Scenario

The Scenario was based on the disappearance on the cold case of a female subject from a family members' house in Carroll Street, Dunedin. The exercise started on the Friday evening with the IMT briefing and then setting about their work with the aim of having tasking's ready for the field teams the following morning.



## 5. Evaluation Methodology

- The agreed outcome of the evaluation activity:

Open and Honest feedback following the identification of what went well and also identification of areas where improvements can be made.

- Evaluation Scope:

We were to evaluate both the IMT and field aspects of the SAREX.

- Aspects of the exercise observed what was not observed:

We observed the set up and running of all elements of the IMT and went into the field and observed and the forward base and field teams including role players.

The data was collected by keeping written notes on our observations which we discussed as we went that were based on what we saw and heard and questioning when we needed more insight into their thinking. The radio chatter was a good insight into the field teams and there interaction with the base.

- The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

We reviewed the notes taken and discussed the positives and learning points with the organisers and had quite a few discussions with participants post the event about how it went.



## 6. Findings and Conclusions

2017 exercise findings

Friday evening

The initial IMT intro was informative but possibly needed a more positive spin with more clarity on what was expected of the people taking part.



It may have been helpful to have prior knowledge of the capabilities of the people who were carrying out the management rolls so that mentoring could be arranged and agreed to before the event started.

Once the overview was done the appointment of CIMS rolls was done straight away.

Risk management was applied to all aspects of the search and management by using the take Fives and in briefings. Safety officers were identified at each shift.

Because this SAREX was a re-run of a real operation it caused some issues around getting into the enquiry process.

When the question was asked about weather a search urgency form should be done they were told not to worry about it. This has the effect of inhibiting the flow of the process that is being practiced.

An explanation was given of how a cold case can bring in new information through active public engagement.

The Lost Person Behaviour book was used, but with groups from around the region used in the exercise, like any information, it can be open to varying interpretations of how the information is applied.

The IC and IMT worked well with good conversations between team managers and this enabled the search to head in a positive and confident direction.

The IAP wasn't completed until 1.5 hours into the exercise. Though teams were working well, there were opportunities for it to be completed sooner. The IAP is an important management tool that holds a lot of information and outlines the aims of how the search should proceed for everybody to see.

Saturday Morning:

The IMT settled into their roles and worked well together.

The Field teams were briefed and deployed effectively. This included a safety briefing that had appropriate hazard identification.

The use of SARtrack was ok but there were some issues because there were not enough AU people available for the SAREX to support the management team.

The documentation and mapping was ok.

IMT arranged for some large A1 sized maps of the search area.

The handover to the second shift went well. It was low key and informative which again set the tone for the next operational period. The incoming managers did shadow the outgoing managers in the role until comfortable to take over.





After the shift change, the CIMS rolls got confused at times for example planning doing team tasking and briefings instead of ops manager.

The exercise inject of the spontaneous volunteers turning up at the forward base has created good thinking and questions from the IMT, by getting them to consider health and safety issues around their use and how they could be effectively used with purposeful tasks in the context of the search and how best to manage them in the field.

There were some issues around the tasking's that were given out in that it wasn't an actual suburban search so how far were the teams to go as section searching went without upsetting home owners.

Some field teams spent quite a bit of time waiting to be re-tasked some for several hours. This may have been due to task completion not being registered on SARtrack. This may have been because the admin support unit was understaffed and because Ops team wasn't keeping an eye on team status for updates.

When SARtrack is being used on a SAREX like this, the people using it need to be proficient with the system so that things flow smoothly. Every small glitch in the support services can impede the wider effort without people realising this.

The debriefing of the teams were detailed and recorded well.

Newer members found it to be a good learning exercise.

There needs to be a better understanding of the CIMS Functions and the roles with in each function by those undertaking the roles.

Need to think through how the exercise is detailed to meet the objectives in more depth.

When teams were returning to the forward sector on Carroll Street, the IMT could have utilised the opportunity to re-task while they were in the field given the base there was equipped with computers and a printer, rather than have teams return to the operation base.

There could have been better coordination between the forward sector and the main base so that there was a better flow of real time information and situational awareness at both ends.

For an exercise to be successful as many "what ifs" as possible need to be prepared for before the exercise starts.

The paradox of automation came into play when there was an issue with SARtrack which lead to people not realising that a message hadn't been actioned and this coupled with a server problem meant that the managers thought everything was OK because the system seemed to be working.

IMT need to consider the best use of the forward sector and who is placed there regardless of the technology.



Human factors need to consider by SAREX organisers as these impinge directly on the outcome.

### **Factors that had a negative effect on the search.**

The water element of the search while initially part of the SAREX planning phase, became unavailable at short notice so tasks around this weren't carried out. Their anticipated inclusion would have provided a number of further challenges to think through for the IMT.

Quite a number of people pulling out at the last minute made it difficult to gauge what skills were available to be used for mentoring verses learning.

The Oamaru SAR vehicle did not turn up so what had been planned around using it as a fully capable forward point to run SARTrack had to be switched to using the police booze bus with an ad hock SARtrack set up which didn't work effectively due partly to a severe issue that wasn't discovered for some time. This affected the performance of the forward point because they weren't receiving the information they needed.

Radio procedures were average. Members talking on the radio didn't think there messages through and weren't writing them down before sending them. This got rectified with a firm message from ops team which lead to better performance.

Radios weren't monitored adequately messages and coordinates weren't combined, this wasted time and caused confusion.

Not all the radios were the same configuration which increased the complexity of the radio plan.



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