

LAST LINE OF DEFENCE

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My Life as a Special Tactics Group Sniper

C. J. EDGE

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For My Boys

Build me a son, O Lord,
who will be strong enough to know when he is weak,
and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid;
one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat,
and humble and gentle in victory.

Build me a son whose wishes
will not take the place of deeds;
a son who will know Thee and that to know himself
is the foundation stone of knowledge.

Lead him, I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort,
but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenge.
Here let him learn to stand up in the storm;
here let him learn compassion for those who fail.

Build me a son whose heart will be clear, whose goal will be high;
a son who will master himself before he seeks to master other men;
one who will reach into the future, yet never forget the past.

And after all these things are his, add, I pray, enough of a sense of humour,
so that he may always be serious, yet never take himself too seriously.
Give him humility, so that he may always remember the simplicity of
true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength.

Then I, his father, will dare to whisper,

"I have not lived in vain"

GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR

Our training sets us up for that.

I'm shooting at someone who wants to kill someone.

It's not right. It's that simple.

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FOREWORD

In January 1977, at the age of 25, I was in the middle of a seven-and-a-half-year prison sentence for selling heroin, at Auckland maximum security prison, Paremoremo. At the same time Craig Edge was entering the opposite end of the criminal justice system, as a 19 year-old recruit at the police college in Trentham. I got out of jail in November 1980, completed a PhD, and finished my career in 2020 as a sociology professor at the University of Canterbury. Craig remained with the police for 37 years in various roles, eventually retiring in 2013 as National Coordinator of Operational Planning and Standards in the National Security Unit at Police National Headquarters, Wellington. We never met during his career, but as I discovered while reading the manuscript, we have over the years crossed paths with and befriended several common acquaintances, including Senior Constable Keith Abbott, former CIB Detective Dave Haslett and former President of the NZ Police Association and current Labour Party MP, Greg O'Connor.

Craig Edge has now written this fine memoir of his career with the New Zealand Police, covering, *inter alia*, his time as a frontline policeman, a dog handler, an Armed Offenders Squad (AOS) team leader, and as a sniper within the elite anti-terrorist unit known as the Special Tactics Group (STG). He has occupied many roles within the police and had a large range of fascinating experiences as a result.

The book begins with the convoluted Rex Haig paua smuggling case, which resulted in the murders of at least two people and in 1997, a hostage siege at Christchurch Prison. Craig explains the extreme and intricate steps that he and other members of the STG took in Fiordland in 1994, in an

attempt to bust Haig and his associates' smuggling activities. I know the country he was deployed to – I've actually hunted the Port Craig/Sandhill Point region myself – so I was able fully to appreciate the discomfort involved in operating a stake-out in that harsh environment, and the challenges of the barren and windswept territory of Foveaux Strait.

Following this section comes another interesting chapter, the 1995 Invercargill gun- shop siege of Eric Gellatly, which involved deployment of both the AOS and the STG and resulted in the death of the offender. Then comes Operation Alison, a 1996 case where the STG was deployed in surveillance activities leading to the imprisonment of two meth lab manufacturers.

The book focuses on STG operations but it is more than that. Chapter 5 provides an intriguing view of the different roles within the STG and the training involved in qualifying as an STG sniper, and meeting the needs to face terrorists head-on. Part II of the book deals with marijuana-crop busting operations and Part III covers diplomatic protection activity, AOS operations, and some of Craig's experiences as a dog handler. It finishes with a most revealing look at the training and work-world of the undercover officer and the many dangers they face.

The final section of the book, Part IV, covers the author's later years with police, concerning intelligence activities, a passport fraud investigation ordered by then Prime Minister Helen Clark, and security secondments to Papua New Guinea, Bougainville, and East Timor.

Last Line of Defence offers a unique insight into a range of aspects of New Zealand policing that have not been written about before – in particular the Special Tactics Group. It is aimed at general readership, but I would recommend it especially to anybody contemplating a career in law enforcement. It is a fast-moving, wide-ranging and gripping tale and it provides a valuable view of the various and often unexplored aspects of law enforcement and crime control in this country.

Greg Newbold (Emeritus Professor, University of Canterbury)
April 2025

Oath

I do swear that I will well and truly serve our Sovereign Lady the Queen in the Police, without favour or affection, malice or ill-will until I am legally discharged; that I will see and cause, Her Majesty's peace to be kept and preserved; that I will prevent to the best of my power all offences against the peace; and that while I continue to hold the said office I will to the best of my skill and knowledge discharge all the duties thereof faithfully according to law.

So help me God.

AS SWORN BY THE AUTHOR ON 17 JANUARY 1977 AT DUNEDIN

INTRODUCTION

*Beware the quiet man.
For while others speak, he watches.
And while others act, he plans.
And when they finally rest ... he strikes.*

– Anonymous

After thirty-seven years of service in the New Zealand Police, I decided it was time to retire, hang up my boots, and write this book. I'd had a broader career than most – frontline policing, investigations, rural policing, dog handling, a venture into the murky world of undercover operations, shift supervisor, shift commander, prosecutor, Communications Centre team leader and manager, Armed Offenders Squad team leader, and a member of the Special Tactics Group (STG).

I had deployments to Bougainville and East Timor, as well as eight years at Police National Headquarters (PNHQ) in Wellington as an investigator in the National Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, and as National Coordinator for Operational Planning and Standards in the National Security Unit. Qualified to inspector level, I also relieved in various inspector positions at Police Headquarters.

I am a graduate of the Faculty of Commerce, majoring in Management, at Charles Sturt University in New South Wales, and studied Gender and Communication in Organisations through the Bachelor of Business Studies programme at Massey University in Wellington.

A number of police officers in New Zealand have felt the urge to write

and publish books. Instances include Ray van Beynen's *Zero-Alpha*, Pete Williamson's *Stoned on Duty* (writing as Bruce Ansley), Mark van Leewarden's *CrimeTime*, Lance Burdett's *Behind The Tape*, and Graham Bell's *Murder, Mayhem and Mischief*. I'm sure there are one or two more. There is also New Zealand's award-winning journalist Jarod Savage's *Gangland* and *Gangster's Paradise*, and Australian journalist Heath O'Loughlin's *Sons of God* about the Victoria Police Special Operations Group. Then there's former London Metropolitan Police Tactical Operator Tony Long's *Lethal Force*, a book those who live normal suburban lives with normal jobs will find hard to relate to. But that could be said for this book as well. Other than the Aussies and the Brits shooting a lot more bad guys than STG, we have the same hardened criminals here in New Zealand, people who intimidate, threaten, kidnap, torture, rape and murder. They should be thankful we don't have loose trigger fingers like our overseas counterparts.

No one has written a book about the New Zealand Police Special Tactics Group before. The STG prefers to fly under the radar. I'll provide a perspective different to those of the writers mentioned earlier as I set about detailing how the STG trains, the consequences of the way the tactical operators are trained, a few of the operations that tactical operators in the STG and I were involved in, and the mental fortitude and mindset required to deal with terrorists and New Zealand's most violent and feared criminals.

I explain events the way I remember them – my recollection of how things unfolded, and my own views and opinions. Some events I have described might sound a bit dramatic, but I don't do drama. If anything, I've understated the facts and how events played out. I have added some light-hearted moments, which hopefully balance the more serious events my colleagues and I were involved in. Later in the book, I also touch on events I experienced outside STG's sphere that give an insight into a varied career of policing over five decades.

Criminals are mentioned by name when their names are on public record. Their names have either appeared in *Court News*, or have been published in the media, or have openly appeared on websites I have researched – or all three. Some police officers are named in full, others only by their first name

or sobriquet. Those who have been involved in events of a highly sensitive nature are not identified for obvious reasons. Some officers have the same first name and therefore may or may not have been at an event.

STG's core job is counter-terrorism – the tactical operators train for it, plan for it, and execute it – on land, sea and air, on ships, buses, planes and trains, and in all locations in the Realm of New Zealand. If it's not that, they are kicking down the doors of New Zealand's worst criminals. When the patrol cars arrive at a job and they can't resolve the situation, they call the Armed Offenders Squad, and if the Armed Offenders Squad arrives and can't resolve the situation, they call the Special Tactics Group. They are New Zealand's last line of defence. If STG turns up on your doorstep, God help you. They haven't come to play Tiddlywinks.

There is nothing that hinders you from doing what must be done.

– Marcus Aurelius

A Short History

As a result of the proliferation of terrorist attacks around the world during the 1970s, in particular the hijackings and bombings of jet airliners, it became evident to countries with international airports that a capability to respond to terrorist acts was essential. In 1977, the New Zealand Police Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) was formed, made up of assaulters and snipers, to train for and respond to such acts of terror. This development was a big step up from our Armed Offenders Squads (AOS), specialist part-time units, which only had their inception thirteen years prior in 1964. My future father-in-law, District Commander Superintendent Tommy Thomson, an inspector at the time, was a founding member of AOS, along with former Police Commissioner Bob Walton and others. Thomson became the officer in charge (OC) of the Christchurch Armed Offenders Squad.

As time went on through the eighties, terrorist incidents declined internationally, and as a result, a review of the training, tactics, capability and future

direction of ATS was undertaken by the New Zealand Police. This resulted in the diversification and broadening of their domestic capability. In 1992, the ATS's name was changed to the Special Tactics Group (STG) and tasked with additional roles. The ATS members, who already underwent a much higher level of training and who had been handpicked from AOS, continued on as STG tactical operators in the new squad. They form a national unit with three teams, one each based in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, ready to be brought together at short notice to respond to high-risk situations beyond the scope of everyday policing and beyond the capability of the AOS.

At the time it was formed, the STG used superior weaponry not previously seen in the New Zealand Police. Even today, their weaponry and tactical equipment is continually assessed and upgraded as necessary. The STG teams have the required capability, assets and resources to respond to acts of terrorism and major armed incidents, including barricaded offenders, sieges, hostage rescue, high-risk covert surveillance, and VIP security.

STG tactical operators use a suite of tactical options for major incidents in both urban and rural settings, including rappelling and hover-jumping for helicopter deployment into difficult terrain, tactical advantage for high-rise rooftop deployment, and explosive building entry.

I joined STG in 1993 as a specialist sniper, while still continuing to do my normal duties, as did all STG members. However, the Sniper Team became a full-time asset at the beginning of 1999 in preparation for the arrival of then President of the United States of America, Bill Clinton. The Assault Team members, who had remained as 'on-call' tactical operators when not carrying out their normal duties, became full-time soon after. It was the first time New Zealand had seen police snipers on rooftops for a VIP security operation. The Sniper Team worked in teams with snipers from the US Secret Service Counter-Sniper Team and the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, both of which acted as observers for the STG snipers, scanning high-rise buildings with binoculars for any potential threats.

The New Zealand Police Special Tactics Group has a worldwide reputation for being one of the best at what they do. They are held in high regard and are highly respected by foreign teams, such as the United States Secret Service,