



VPD 68(08)

# VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT

## REPORT TO THE VANCOUVER POLICE BOARD

**REPORT DATE:** November 13, 2018  
**COMMITTEE MEETING DATE:** December 6, 2018  
**BOARD REPORT #** 1812C02

**To:** Vancouver Police Board Service and Policy Complaint Review Committee

**From:** Ken Athans, Acting Inspector, Emergency and Operational Planning Section

**Subject:** **Service or Policy Complaint #2018-135 – Response to Assault Rifles at Public Events (OPCC File No.2018-14862)**

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### **Recommendation:**

**That the Vancouver Police Board Service and Policy Complaint Review Committee dismiss the complaint with reasons.**

### **SUMMARY:**

On June 12, 2018, the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner (OPCC) received a complaint outlining concerns related to members of the Vancouver Police Department being armed with “assault rifles” while policing public events. The complainant referenced news and social media content about officers deployed with carbine rifles at Italian Days on June 10, 2018 and asserted that this was inappropriate and culturally insensitive.

### **Analysis of Complaint:**

The basis of the complaint makes two specific points:

1. The complainant was of the opinion that police carrying “assault rifles” at large public gatherings was unsafe. The complainant questioned if the deployment of assault rifles would actually make an event safer from a terror attack. The complainant believed the presence of “over armed” police was intimidating to the public, causing them to feel nervous rather than protected.
2. The VPD was culturally insensitive and the presence of heavily armed police at Italian Days would trigger memories of harsh government treatment suffered by Italian Canadians during WW II.

## **Background:**

The VPD's Emergency and Operational Planning Section (EOPS) prepares operational plans for more than 1,000 events in Vancouver each year. These plans outline specific safety requirements for individual events to ensure the safety of attendees, organizers, police and other first responders. For each event, EOPS prepares threat assessments based on local, national and international events and intelligence and makes every attempt to mitigate potential threats. EOPS also takes into consideration factors specific to the event – like the number of expected attendees and location – to determine safety requirements.

Italian Days on the Drive is an annual, vehicle-free street celebration on Vancouver's Commercial Drive that includes Italian food, music and festivities. The event runs approximately 14 blocks between Venables and Grandview, in "Little Italy." The event draws about 300,000 attendees of all cultures and ages.

## **Discussion:**

Recent vehicular attacks nationally and around the world have heightened the viability of vehicle ramming as a legitimate terrorist or lone actor tactic, requiring attention from public safety officials.

According to the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism, terrorism-inspired vehicle ramming attacks in the West have increased at an alarming rate. From 2013 to 2017, terrorists carried out 25 vehicle-ramming attacks in North America and Europe, resulting in 156 fatalities and 790 injuries. More than half of the attacks involved the perpetrator exiting the vehicle and carrying out additional attacks using a bladed weapon, firearm and/ or explosives.

In response to the attack in Nice, France in 2016, EOPS collaborated with the Emergency Response Section (ERS) to assess Vancouver's vulnerability. Based on terror events around the world, almost all large cities in North America and Europe were using barriers at large public events. EOPS examined security measures of other cities and as a result, a Vehicle Barrier Plan for the 2016 Celebration of Light was established.

The plan called for primary vehicle barrier points consisting of City of Vancouver heavy vehicles (dump trucks) and specially trained ERS officers with C8 carbines. The objective of the plan was to mitigate the ease with which a vehicle could access areas where the public gathered. The large barrier vehicles (dump trucks) would cause significant, if not debilitating, damage to the attacking vehicle in the event of a collision. The ERS members with the C8 carbines would act as a visual deterrent with the ability to provide an immediate, tactical response, if required. Again, almost all major cities in North America would include long rifle over-watch where the public has gathered in large public spaces.

Evidence demonstrates that the presence of long rifles, with or without vehicle barriers, can serve to deter a terrorist attack. When a terrorist attack does occur, a trained police

member armed with a long rifle improves his or her ability to stop the continued path of a vehicle borne attack and can react swiftly to stop an assailant who exits a suspect vehicle to continue the attack by other means.

The single biggest advancement in police capability to respond to active deadly threats in Canada has been the introduction of the patrol carbine. When equipped with the modern electronic sight, the carbine is both incredibly fast and extremely accurate at distances much farther than handguns, and could achieve a disabling shot, including in crowd situations.

The VPD has deployed officers with C8 carbines at numerous, large public events like Celebration of Light, Canada Day and New Year's Eve since 2016.

The VPD recognizes that although the deployment of officers with the C8 carbines has huge public safety benefits, it can also affect members of the public in different ways – some people are reassured by the presence of long guns, while others are more uncomfortable with seeing them at public or sporting venues.

## **Conclusion**

Since October 2014, Canada's Integrated Terrorism Assessment Centre has rated the national terrorism threat level as "medium", meaning a violent act of terrorism could occur, but is not "likely" or "imminent". As a result, VPD commanders and planners will continue to prepare for, and manage events where there is risk to public safety or the potential of active deadly threat exists.

EOPS adheres to the VPD's strategic plan to enhance public safety by keeping pace with emerging trends and deploying the proper equipment and tactical expertise at large public gatherings. There are over 200 public events in Vancouver annually. Only 5 percent are assessed to require additional public safety measures like long gun over-watch and vehicle barriers.

The VPD acknowledges the complainant's concerns that the sight of officers with carbine rifles can be concerning, however, in reviewing best practices and speaking with subject matter experts, we are satisfied that this strategy is proportional in keeping the department's public safety mandate.

In conclusion, it is recommended that the Committee dismiss the complaint with reasons.

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Ken Athans  
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