

I feel sure most of you will remember our former SIG chairman Charles Wink (late of the RHKP) and erstwhile country manager with Group 4 here in the Kingdom. Charlie has moved on to pastures new and I am certain you will join me in wishing him well in his new and challenging sojourn in sunny Beirut .

Prior to making good his escape, and at a crucial summit meeting held at an undisclosed Riyadh night spot, over several (non alcoholic) cans of Holsten, Charles was able to cajole the author into becoming the next chairman of the RGBB Security SIG. (Never volunteer for anything sprang to mind. I was weak).

So here I am , in the hot seat , enthusiastically assisted by Peter Hurry, executive manager of Kroll Security Group and modest spouse of a famous Riyadh thespian. (At least I think that's how you spell it).

What is it all about you ask ? Why participate and what do I get out of it ? In answer to the first question, the Security SIG aims to provide and facilitate several core functions. Primarily we aim to gather together a diverse and eclectic mix of security professionals from across the Kingdom in order to share ideas and 'best practice' for the benefit of all .

Secondly we have an interest in creating a platform from which relevant 'guest speakers', both from within our own ranks and from external sources, can be heard. Additionally, and in keeping with the ethos of the RGBB, we also aim to create a two-way, commercial conduit via which, related products and services, perceived as 'of interest' to ourselves and the broader community, can be presented.

On a practical note, my pet project at the moment is to establish a 'real time' , telephonic call chain which services subscribers across the entire Kingdom. The purpose of the said call chain is to disseminate immediate security 'alerts' to participating members in an efficient, accurate and timely manner with a minimum of individual effort .

Simply put, each participating member becomes a strategically placed 'link' within the chain . On receipt of an 'alert' the receiving 'link' simply makes a mobile phone call to the specified 'next link' and passes on the relevant information. (There are plans afoot to deal with scenarios whereby the 'missing link' rears its hideous head.)

Mobile phone calls are the favoured option for the onward transmission of 'alerts' from one link to the next. E mail and SMS messages neither acknowledge receipt nor confirm the recipients

ability or intent to 'pass it on'. In most cases it will be a novel and refreshing requirement to have a two way conversation with another human being. As far as negating 'chinese whisper syndrome' is concerned, I have a cunning plan. We are also working on adding a 'rumour control' clearing house to the call chain programme.

In another life, appropriately enough when that great song 'the chain' was doing its initial rounds as part of the Fleetwood Mac 'Rumours' albumn , I managed to put a similar plan into practice whilst serving as a young policeman in what was then Rhodesia . This occured after yet another crucial summit meeting, not on this occasion involving any non-alcoholic Holsten, whereby I was once again 'volunteered'. This time it was to head up the then embryonic, and much vaunted, 'Agric Alert' initiative, aimed at facilitating inter-farm 'alerts' across an isolated tobacco growing region some 250Kms from Salisbury. In those days remote farmsteads such as these were under constant threat of terrorist attack and were in fact hit on an almost nightly basis.

The 'Agric Alert' initiative was basically a farm to farm call chain, with an additional monitored link to the local district police station (which in this case was nearly a 100Kms distant). As the mobile phone was yet to be invented and even primitive landbased 'party lines' were thin on the ground the system utilized 'radio'. World sanctions were biting, money was in short supply and the 'base station' sets with which each farm in the chain had been issued were cobbled together from spare parts and powered by old car batteries lashed together with string and wire. Combating the 'armed struggle' then was not a high tech enterprise.

One fateful evening, having overseen the installation of radio base stations across some sixteen farms, african sergeant Ncube and I sat smoking in the makeshift 'radio room' on farmstead

SECURITY SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

Jim Mann
SIG Chairman

Victoria Falls in what is
now Zimbabwe, near
where Jim was once
stationed



‘Seven’. It was 0100Hrs and the relative stillness of that glorious African night had settled about us. Suddenly our idyll was shattered by the unmistakable staccato chatter of an AK 47 on ‘full auto’.

“My goodness Sergeant Ncube”, I said calmly to my trusty ethnic companion, “It sounds as though those blighters are shooting at us”. This was it, what a way to test the system. A real live terrorist attack (never volunteer for anything sprang to mind on that occasion as well). Sergeant Ncube waxed pale as I, with trembling hand, clutched the radio mike and began the all stations ‘alert’ mantra. “All stations, All stations, this is farm seven, standby, standby. We are taking incoming from the north east corner of our inner perimeter”. It got worse... Much worse because, after following the radio ‘alert’ protocols and in so doing waking up sixteen farmers, their wives, their kids, their labourers, their dogs, their goats and other sundry district residents and hangers on, as well as calling in the cavalry from the District police station (Two sleepy african constables in an old landrover who had to bounce and crunch their way through 80 Kms of African bush in the pitch dark), I suddenly realized that the firing signature of this particular AK47 was not quite right and that the usual rocket and mortar fire one would expect as part and parcel of the show during these little adventures was absent .

Oh dear, my gallantry medal citation began to slip through my fingers, a career in CID cycle theft unit loomed. Looking up at the radio set, its charge light winking insolently at me, a sneering cyclops in the dark, I noticed that which I had previously overlooked, the inner perimeter fence sensor ‘speaker unit’ was innocently parked atop the radio set . It was making a very loud noise which sounded a little like an AK47 on ‘full auto’, albeit one that never ran out of bullets. My future detective skills came to the fore , I pulled hard on another cigarette. Sergeant Ncube left me, skulking from the room in disgust. Could it possibly be that a large flying ant, common in this district, had become entrapped in the bellshaped protective body of the fence sensor on the north east corner of the inner perimeter fence? Could its wingbeat during an escape frenzy become an AK47 soundalike? Would my Commanding Officer see the funny side of it when I was marched in to district HQ later that same day? No, perhaps not. Sixteen grizzled tobacco farmers were not amused ...

Predictable and inevitable comments from the readership, speculating on interpretations of, and variations to, the term ‘de bugging’, whilst justified, may be a little unkind to the author. After all I avoided a punishment posting to CID cycle theft section and now live in Riyadh, holding down a good job as a (non technical) risk consultant for Saudi Arabia’s Best Bank.



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