

South Wales Police



The Tilley Award

nomination from the

**Southern Sector, Merthyr Tydfil,
'A' Division,
South Wales Police.**

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Project title;	Operation Ottawa.
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Summary.

Operation Ottawa was an initiative against car crime in the Merthyr Tydfil area of South Wales. It was brought about by a sharp increase in this type of crime which coincided with a new trend of dumping vehicles in the Bogey Road area in addition to the more usual areas where vehicles were dumped on a regular basis. The problem was identified by PS Davies in mid to late March 2003 and the initiative started in April 2003 and continued into early May.

Merthyr Tydfil has generally suffered from high levels of car crime, in comparison with other areas, and this has in part been attributed to high levels of poverty and unemployment amongst the younger members of the local population.

The Bogey Road bisects an area of abandoned mine workings and waste tips. Since the decline of the mining industry this area has been used for grazing animals and for a number of recreational activities such as off-road motorcycling. There are many dirt track roads, bridges, gullies, tunnels and disused buildings which are now used by local people as short cuts and concealed roads.

On the Western end of Bogey Road is a small campsite consisting of several caravans, there is a farm to the South and a working industrial complex towards the eastern end. Despite these places, the Bogey Road is generally secluded and little used throughout the day and even less so during the hours of darkness.

Due to its proximity to the upper suburbs of Merthyr Tydfil and its relative seclusion, the Bogey Road has always been subject to certain problems, namely fly tipping and the dumping of cars, stolen or otherwise. Over a period in April 2003, the Bogey Road saw a huge increase in the number of cars being dumped in the area immediately to the East and North of the caravan site. It was discovered that these vehicles were being used for rallying, cannibalised and then discarded or set on fire.

The area in question was served by a main dirt track and several off shoots to that track. Also of importance were several gullies which linked the area of dumped vehicles to the nearby housing estates. These gullies were only usable on foot but they offered covert access and egress to the dumping site for the criminals.

It could be seen then that this area was a facility that offered criminals an area free from interference in which to carry out their crime unmolested and with easy escape routes. This in turn led to a massive increase in car crime for a short period until the problem was identified and solved.

Project Description.

1. Project objectives.

In line with Divisional and Force objectives and to solve a local problem affecting many people in the Merthyr Tydfil area, the object of the operation was to reduce car crime and to help curtail the activities of those criminals involved in order to achieve a lasting reduction. Specifically, this operation was aimed at denying the use of the Bogey Road area to those criminals who would use it to further their own goals and by doing so, remove a 'facility' which was assisting in the theft and destruction of people's cars.

It could be seen that the area itself was a catalyst for the theft of vehicles due its offering a safe haven for the enjoyment of stolen vehicles by the thieves and other involved persons. Once a vehicle had been stolen and taken to the Bogey Road area, the thieves felt that they were safe and could therefore drive recklessly, dismantle and burn the vehicles with impunity.

The objectives were therefore to;

1. Arrest all criminals involved.
2. Return usable vehicles to their owners.
3. Recover and identify destroyed vehicles.
4. Deny the criminal's access to the Bogey Road.

2. Defining the problem.

Crimes reported.

It could be seen from patrol and crime reports that there was a sharp increase in the number of cars being stolen during the week of 14th to 21st April 2003. During this week, 121 offences of car crime were reported compared with 47 during the previous week.

Of the 121 offences, 49 were criminal damage to motor vehicles and 30 were thefts of motor vehicles. There were 42 other offences including attempted thefts, interferences and unauthorised takings of motor vehicles. It was noted that many crimes classed as criminal damage may well have also fallen into the attempted theft category.

Many of the vehicles taken to the Bogey Road area were used for rallying until they ceased to operate and were very badly damaged as a result. There were a number of vehicles burnt out completely and there was evidence that several were stolen for spare parts and then destroyed by fire.

Actual numbers of vehicles left at the Bogey Road area were between 4 and 5 each night. The vehicles would be driven to the location at night and then due to the lack of street lighting, left until daylight when they would be cannibalised, driven until destruction and burnt in many cases.

Due to the seclusion and perceived inaccessibility of this area and the fact that it was not on any regular patrol route, many of the earlier vehicles had been at the location for some time before they were recovered. The problem was that as only the criminals were frequenting this area, the dumped vehicles were not reported to the police for several days or even weeks in some cases.

Public perception.

The large number of offences in that period can be assumed to have caused a certain loss of confidence in the police by those who suffered from that crime. Also effected by any perceptions would be any persons having contact with victims and any person in the victim's social group. This number of offences would have had a larger effect on public confidence due to the actual number of offences committed being nearly three times the normal rate.

Public perception of the car crime problem was exasperated due to the dumping of these vehicles and the subsequent burning of many. With vehicles being dumped in various locations, the Bogey Road area being the latest one to be used, it was perceived by some that the police were powerless to stop the thieves.

Also at stake was the reputation of Merthyr Tydfil as a town. Councillors were made aware of the negative impact that columns of smoke from burning vehicles were having on local traders. As the Bogey Road dumping area was adjacent to the A4060, a main trunk road through the Borough, many passing that area could not help but to notice cars that had been set ablaze.

Police response.

The police response was initially hampered by a lack of detailed local knowledge of the area and a lack of accurate maps. The criminal's knowledge of the area allowed them to evade capture by using gullies under a main road and by using the terrain and other features to their advantage. In the first instance, it was not clear how the stolen vehicles were actually getting to where they were being dumped and at first, the police would only know when a new vehicle had been added to the growing number of wrecks by spotting a column of black smoke.

Arresting an individual presented several problems. In order to get to the area concerned, police vehicles would have to take a tortuous route and could be heard and seen from some distance. Once alerted, the criminals could escape on foot by using one of several gullies which provided drainage under the main A4060 road, and then by melting away into a local housing estate.

In addition to these problems, it transpired that one particularly prolific individual was being harboured in one of the caravans at the campsite. This provided problems in that the campsite was readily accessible to the vehicle dumping area and evidence subsequently showed that the caravan provided a safe haven for that individual and for a number of his friends. Criminals using the caravan were prevented from being arrested on one occasion due to a police officer being threatened with a large Alsatian dog.

3. Solving the problem.

Intelligence gathering.

The Divisional Crime Analyst was tasked with providing statistics to highlight the problem, with the analysis of trends and the identification of possible offenders. A package was submitted to the Divisional Tasking Group from which the Divisional resources were allocated and assistance was sought from other operational departments.

In order to provide better knowledge of the area, the Force helicopter was tasked to photograph the whole area. In addition to this, officers went there during daylight hours and familiarised themselves with the land. During one such familiarisation, PS Davies discovered

the escape routes through the gullies under the A4060 and the vehicle access route via a track several miles long, starting from near the Eastern end of the Bogey Road. This track ran parallel to the Bogey Road but could not be readily seen from it. The track was thought to be blocked with large boulders but in fact one of the boulders had been moved to allow access.

The type and quality of vehicles being stolen suggested an unsophisticated approach by juvenile criminals looking for entertainment rather than profit, although there was some evidence to suggest that a few vehicles had parts stolen. This allowed the targeting of likely individuals most of whom were already known to police and the courts.

Initial police action.

Initial police action consisted of regular patrols to the affected area and officers were encouraged to drive on to the land in order to provide a presence when possible. This was a difficult undertaking due to the large area to be covered and the nature of the topography. This tactic produced a number of long foot chases resulting in several arrests.

Due to the difficulties presented by the topography, a close liaison was kept with the Force helicopter which assisted where possible during chases and through routine over flights, it provided a visible deterrent.

Further to this dog handlers were used to assist in arrests at the campsite where previously, dogs owned by criminals had been used to prevent such arrests. The dog handlers were also utilised in cases where vehicles had been recently dumped. Several arrests were made due to the co-operation between the dog handlers and patrol units.

Follow up police action.

Follow up actions consisted of targeting offenders through a variety of ways. The identity of likely offenders and those arrested for relevant crimes were made known to all shifts through the use of state- of-the-art briefing equipment. Officers were encouraged to make themselves known to these offenders and to regularly check the offender's known frequented areas. Officers were also encouraged to submit intelligence reports on these individuals and a greater emphasis was placed on the evaluation of submitted intelligence.

Custody officers were encouraged to use all available powers under the Bail Act in order to curtail the activities of arrested target criminals. This included use of remand powers where justifiable and an emphasis on severe bail conditions. The most potent bail condition was that of curfew when accompanied by the conditions of residence and of reporting to officers on demand at the curfew address.

Patrol sergeants were made aware of those persons on bail and on curfew and each night officers were required to visit criminals subject to curfew. Any person found transgressing a curfew condition would be arrested and put before the court as soon as possible and as a matter of priority.

When a vehicle was found, it was recovered immediately by using the Single Vehicle Recovery Scheme operated by South Wales Police in conjunction with local recovery firms. This helped to prevent vehicles from being burnt out and allowed the return of several vehicles to owners who only possessed third party insurance.

Partner agency involvement.

The Magistrates Courts User Group was consulted and this group ensured that any bail conditions set by the courts at subsequent bail hearings were then faxed directly to the

custody unit. From there, they were fed into the intelligence system and patrol officers were briefed accordingly, with new checks being scheduled where necessary.

The Local Authority, Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council, provided assistance by placing large boulders on the access routes in order to prevent future access by unauthorised persons. It had been discovered that the criminals had somehow moved one of the boulders sufficiently to allow a single vehicle to pass it by, while maintaining an illusion of security to the casual observer. Once this had been identified, the Local Authority replaced the boulder.

The Local Authority also assisted with the removal of many vehicle shells and wrecks, thus preventing contaminants from leaching into the soil and any danger to inquisitive children.

The Water Board were contacted with regard to the exposed gullies under the A4060 which provided ready escaped routes. Plans to close these gullies with metal grills to prevent them being used as escape routes were formulated.

The local media, The Merthyr Express, were used to highlight awareness of the various issues, reinforcing crime prevention advice and encouraging the reporting of incidents etc.

4. Results achieved.

Access denial.

Prior to the start of the operation, criminals had been using the area but only infrequently. At some point during the early months of 2003, it is apparent that a large boulder was moved by some method, just enough to allow vehicles to pass but not to attract attention. In fact, to the casual observer, the space between that boulder and its neighbour did not look as though it would allow access to a vehicle.

Having discovered the route of access and egress, these were again blocked thus denying the thieves a 'safe haven' for their activities. One of the great attractions to this area was the formulation of a rally circuit by the thieves on which they would drive stolen cars until destruction in many cases.

With the removal of access, the area around Bogey Road is now devoid of stolen cars.

Statistical analysis – crime reduction.

Before access was denied, as many as 4 or 5 cars would be taken to this area per night, leading up to the date that the boulders were replaced. After this date no cars were taken to the relevant area.

The Divisional figures for vehicle crime at that time show;

February 2003	Total offences =	181.	Detection rate = 12%
March 2003	Total offences =	253.	Detection rate = 9%
April 2003	Total offences =	286.	Detection rate = 7%
May 2003	Total offences =	236.	Detection rate = 13%
June 2003	Total offences =	237.	Detection rate = 9%
July 2003	Total offences =	217.	Detection rate = 25%
August 2003	Total offences =	173.	Detection rate = 8%

The figures for April show a sharp increase in vehicle crime from the February figures and they then drop off again towards August. Operation Ottawa was the only structured car crime operation being run throughout April 2003. It can be seen that a correlation can be drawn between the running of that operation and the subsequent drop in car crime.

Intelligence and awareness.

Due to the drive towards targeting the main offenders, many officers who did not previously have personal knowledge of those offenders subsequently gained that knowledge. This was done by introducing photographs to the briefing screen and insisting that curfew checks were carried out by patrol officers by making face to face contact with offenders at their home addresses on a nightly basis.

Intelligence reports on target offenders increased in number and general officer awareness of vehicle crime also increased. The new briefing screen at Merthyr Tydfil, the Smart Board, was used to good effect at briefing sessions on all shifts, thus ensuring that intelligence gained was disseminated to all.

Awareness of offenders was improved throughout the Division and an additional benefit could be seen in that the offender's families were made aware of consequences surrounding their behaviour, namely the nightly inconvenience caused by officers calling at their homes.

5. The problem solving approach.

The National Intelligence Model.

The Merthyr Tydfil Division has pioneered the implementation of the National Intelligence Model (NIM) within the South Wales Police and the approach taken in this operation was guided by the principles set out in NIM. The Problem Orientated Policing (POP) approach fits easily within the methods proposed by NIM and it can be seen that this operation is an example of how POP principles were utilised to achieve results.

The SARA model.

The SARA model as proposed by the Problem Orientated Policing approach can be seen in the way that Operation Ottawa was born and in the way it was executed.

Scanning.

This was the intelligence gathering phase, starting with the initial reports which gave rise to the identification of the problem through to the systematic collection of data which provided the information on which the operation was based.

Intelligence phase;

1. Initial crime reports and reports of cars burning in affected area.
2. Sharp increase in reported crime of type involved.
3. Divisional crime analyst tasked to review intelligence relating to;
Victim Characteristics,
Location Characteristics,
Offender Characteristics.
4. Force helicopter tasked to provide photography.

Analysis.

Analysis of available data provided reasons for the use of the area in question, those persons who were likely to be committing the crime and the type of victims likely to be affected.

Victims;

Owners of older cars mainly Vauxhalls and Fords. Generally these people were not from the more affluent sector of the community and many cars were insured for third party risks only.

Location;

The area to the Western end of the Bogey Road, North and East of the campsite situated there. Vehicular access routes and readily available escape routes serving an area of flat ground being used for rallying activities.

Offenders;

Young male youths aged between 14 and 17 years who were already known to police for petty crime. Several were persistent offenders.

Response.

The problem was tackled from a number of directions;

Victims;

A media campaign highlighted crime prevention advice especially to likely victims as identified above. Vehicles were removed and returned to owners as soon as possible so that damage was minimised where possible.

Location;

The area was patrolled frequently, photographs made for officers to use as maps, and the Local Authority blocked the vehicular access routes.

Offenders;

These were identified and targeted. Many arrests were made for primary offences but also for bail offences. Robust application of Bail Act powers and follow up action ensured that persistent offenders were prevented from a free reign.

Assessment.

The operation was an undoubted success in that the area used by the criminals has been denied to them, thus taking away their motivation to steal cars for use in that 'arena'. Crime figures showed a decrease in the numbers of vehicles attacked for several months after the operation and several persistent offenders were imprisoned during this period.

Less tangible benefits could be seen to be greater officer awareness of criminals and procedures and greater co-operation between Criminal Justice Agencies.

The future.

Even though this operation is now long over, it brought newly introduced systems into focus for the officers on patrol duties and it had a lasting effect on daily methods of operation. It is a good example of how ideas can evolve by using NIM and POP principles to tackle a particular problem.

The new systems brought into use were the large screen briefing tool in the parade room, the Smart Board, and the use of information from the crime analyst. These were used in conjunction to ensure that officers were aware of crime and policing issues and this operation was one of the first to use intelligence from the crime analyst by displaying it in such a visual format on a consistent basis.

The fact that the photographs of the area concerned could be displayed on a large wall screen from where they were stored on a computer, allowed officers to see the problem much more clearly. When this was coupled with bail information and target criminal's photographs, it brought home to patrol officers the use and value of such systems.

Where there was conservatism and fear of change, there is now a willingness to participate in and fully utilise these NIM systems.

Bail checks are now an accepted method of crime reduction by the legitimate targeting of persistent criminals. Procedures for retrieving information from the courts in relation to bail conditions imposed are now in place on a permanent basis. Custody and patrol officers alike are aware of who the target criminals are and they are more minded to use all available powers against them.