

TRAINING FOR NEW CHALLENGES

News Limited has developed a number of courses to better equip staff for the dynamics of modern journalism



THE guerrilla leader was becoming increasingly agitated. Waving a pistol in the air, he ordered the News Limited news team out of his camp. Forced at gunpoint to give up the keys to their four-wheel-drive, the reporters and photographer faced a night-time trek through dense bush with only a compass to guide them.

Would they make it to safety and be able to file their pictures and story of political murders and torture in a violence-torn Pacific nation?

Happily, yes... because they were only an hour south of Sydney, and veteran Group reporter Ian McPhedran, *The Australian* photographer

Lindsay Moller and *Daily Telegraph* reporter Justin Vallejo were playing out a scenario in a new training course developed for News staff working overseas.

News and Crisis is part of a tiered program that delivers targeted training for reporters and photographers who cover events in hostile overseas environments. It builds on the successful two-day News and Conflict program that began in late 2005.

"This course will be of great benefit to people reporting from conflict zones," Ian McPhedran says. It was developed by group editorial development manager Sharon Hill, who trained with Ian,



DANGER MAN: Reporter Ian McPhedran with a "guerilla" during the course and, inset, a simulated land mine explodes

Lindsay and Justin at the bush camp and driver-training range at Mt Bulli.

"It was dirty and uncomfortable," says Sharon. "On the last day the temperature plunged and it rained constantly, turning the unsealed tracks into bogs – which were ideal for practising high-speed skids and for recovering the deliberately bogged four-wheel-drive."

The three-day course draws on the overseas experiences of scores of News Limited reporters and photographers. It seeks to replicate in a safe environment many of the situations they face in countries where danger is ever-present and aggression can quickly escalate to violence.

It also teaches basic skills to keep reporters and photographers on the road, healthy and working. The course covers situational awareness, vehicle fitness and maintenance, protective driving skills, basic navigation, use of satellite phones to file stories and pictures, explosive ordnance awareness, personal safety, crisis first aid, and negotiation skills for threatening situations.

"When added to News and Conflict, this latest hostile-environment course is five days of the best and most practical preparation any reporter



CUTTING TIME: Justin Bowden, CEO of training consultancy Beltin Group, shows Justin Vallejo how to slash his seatbelt ready for an emergency escape wearing body armour

or photographer can have for working safely overseas," Sharon says.

"As we discovered when we piloted the course, even the most experienced overseas operators can develop their skills to be more effective journalists and photographers and to work more safely in inherently stressful and risky situations."

News and Crisis is delivered by instructors from a military and policing background, all of whom have direct and recent experience in the countries to which News Limited staff are frequently sent. This contributed to the realism of the guerrilla-camp exercise and other scenarios

EVACUATING THE CAR WITH AN 'INJURED' COLLEAGUE IN 11KG OF ARMOUR REQUIRES QUICK THINKING

that mimic the situations staff face covering news overseas. To replicate realistic situations, Ian, Lindsay and Justin performed most of the in-car actions while wearing training versions of the ballistic armour and helmets recently bought by Nationwide News.

"Executing a safe emergency-braking manoeuvre at high speed and then evacuating the car with an 'injured' colleague while wearing 11kg of body armour requires quick-thinking and self-control," Sharon says. "By the end of the course, all were comfortable wearing the armour and performed the manoeuvres effectively."

For inquiries about hostile environment training or ballistic armour, contact Sharon Hill (02) 9288 3756 or hills@newsltd.com.au
