

Spring Hill Siege 1976

In mid-1966, Jack Pizzey, then Minister for Education and Police, instructed the Commissioner of Police to form a Police Emergency Squad. After hand picked Queensland officers, completed specialised training with the New South Wales police, the new Queensland Squad was ready to go in 1968. Initially, the Squad included 33 men, handpicked and trained in tactics to apprehend armed offenders in siege situations, hijacking of aircraft and counter-terrorism. The Squad received regular refresher tactical training and training in the use of handguns, rifles, sniper-rifles, shotguns, and tear gas equipment.

On 22 September 1976 during regular weapons training at the Greenbank Army establishment, a call came about a siege in Brisbane City. Shortly after noon, Robert William Wilson, 36, a cleaner residing in Spring Hill, armed with a .22 calibre rifle and 500 rounds of ammunition went on a random shooting spree in Boundary Street. Wilson shot and killed Monika Schleuss, 17, as she was crossing Boundary Street, and wounded Donald William Hepburn Galloway, 28, who was also crossing the street at the time. He then began shooting into a nearby milk bar, killing Marianne Kalatzis, 18, wounding Mavis Ethel Saunders, 17, and Virginia Hollidge, 25. Wilson then shot Quinto Alberti, 48, who was in a neighbouring shop.

When the Emergency Squad team arrived at the scene Wilson, who had taken four women and a man hostage, was locked in a suburban house. One of the emergency responders, Constable Barry Krosch was able to observe Wilson through a key-hole to see the hostages were held seated in a leather lounge chair with Wilson standing behind, brandishing the loaded rifle. Around 4 o'clock, Officer in Charge Superintendent Bob Matheson authorised police to storm the room. Senior Constables John O'Gorman and Noel Gollschewski broke the door down. Gollschewski fell when the door gave way and the offender fired shot at them. O'Gorman, hoping to scare Wilson to release his firearm, shot his pump-action shotgun in Wilson's direction and sent a round through the ceiling. Constable Krosch followed into the room and sent a shot from his Smith & Wesson .38 calibre pistol into the floor. No one was injured. Senior Constable John O'Gorman managed to knock the Wilson down and overpower him. All the hostages were quickly moved to safety. Wilson was then handcuffed and led from the house. By 4:15pm the siege was over.

William Robert Wilson spent three years in Wolston Park Hospital, Wacol after the shootings, but subsequently his lawyers were satisfied he was fit to plead. Wilson, at the age of 40, pleaded guilty to two charges of murder and four of attempted murder. He was sentenced to life imprisonment on each murder charge and 10 years jail, to be served concurrently, on each of the other charges.

In 1987, the Emergency Squad involved in the Spring Hill siege was divided into specialised sub-units and re-named the Tactical Response Group (TRG). Two years later, the Tactical Response team, a part of the TRG became a separate unit – the Special Weapons and Operations Squad, or SWOS. In 1992, SWOS was further re-organised into the Special Emergency Response.



A brave photographer risked life to snap this pic, showing Constable Barry Krosch removing his trusty sniper rifle from the rear of the police vehicle, and Constable 1/c John Carnes and Constable Jan Lidicky crouching on the right. Image courtesy of the Courier-Mail.